

和ヶ原聰司

イラスト

029



YU-SHA NO SEGARE

電撃文庫

勇者のセガレ
YUUSHA NO SEGARE

VOLUME 1

Written by Wagahara Satoshi
Illustrated by 029 (Oniku)

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勇者の セガレ

和ヶ原聰司
イラスト 029

剣崎康雄

けん
ざき
やす

お

「何か、世界規模で流行つてて
ネットゲームとか
そういう話なんだろ?」



- 年齢 18
- 所属 武丘高校
- 階級 三年生
- 得意武器 合唱・声楽

Kenzaki Yasuo

Age: 18

Affiliation: Takeoka High School.

Rank: Third Year Student.

Weapons of choice: Singing in a choir, vocal music.

Diana KRONE



ディアナ

（ディアネイズ・
クローケ）

「異世界アンノン・ランゲより、
救世の勇者ヒデオ・ケンザキ殿
使者としてやってきました」

年齢 19

所属 レスティリア王国魔導機士団

階級 少佐

得意武器 剣士隊制式カストゥル
剣士隊制式ポルックス

Dianaze "Diana" Krone

Age: 19

Affiliation: Resteria Kingdom Magic Battalion.

Rank: Major.

Weapons of choice:

- Sword Corps standard issue 『Castor』.
- Sword Corps standard issue 『Pollux』.

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年齢	17
所属	狭間沢高校
階級	三年生
得意武器	料理・接客

「や入君ならそりやあ
沢山の女の子と仲良くなってるんだろうし?
私なんか覚えてなくとも仕方ないよね!」



SHOGI
SCHOOL

Tatewaki Shouko

Age: 17

Affiliation: Hazamazawa High School.

Rank: Third Year Student.

Weapons of choice: Cooking, looking after visitors.

剣崎英雄

けん

ざき ひで

お

「父さん、異世界に行って、
勇者にならうと思うんだ」



年齢 48

所属 株式会社ヤマハタ営業部

階級 アソシエイトマネージャー

得意武器 聖剣ルタバーガ

Kenzaki Hideo

Age: 48

Affiliation: Yamahata Corporation, Sales Department

Rank: Associate Manager

Weapon of choice: Holy Sword Liutberga



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勇者の セガレ

和ヶ原聰司
イラスト 029

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PROLOGUE

THE BEGINNING OF THE END OF A PEACEFUL FAMILY

Parents will always have a part of their life in the past that their children can never see.

Kenzaki Yasuo, who had just turned eighteen years old, couldn't remember when he had become properly aware of such an obvious fact. However, after having reached this age, he couldn't say that he knew everything about his family, and also realized that not knowing wasn't a major issue. Even if there were a lot of things he didn't know, his family's relationship was still pretty good.

He had a father who worked as a manager in a fairly large company without any mishaps. His mother was currently a housewife, but she occasionally did part-time work. His sister was at a difficult age, being in the third year of middle school, an experience he still remembered.

He didn't know any details about what kind of work his father did at his company, nor did he know how his mother spent her time while he was at school. His sister was attending the same middle school that he once did, but he didn't think for a minute that she was having the same kind of school life that he had.

Similarly, his father, mother, and even his sister should have been able to see most of his life, but only the superficial aspects. They probably saw a constrained view such as his image as a high school student, or his schedule for each day..

However, they probably knew barely any details about how Yasuo interacted with his friends and teachers at school, what dreams he had as he worked on his studies, and how he spent his time when he was not with his family. Even so, his father, mother, sister, and

himself were probably working from their own respective positions to keep their family of four in a peaceful state.

However, the situation that was unfolding before Yasuo's eyes was something that would shatter that small confidence of his.

"I'm... home..."

The season was not yet spring, and the weather was still cold. Yasuo entered the living room that was illuminated by the setting sun, and the only thing he heard was the humming sound of the refrigerator in the dining room, ringing in his ears.

Yasuo stood rooted in place, without putting his bag down and still wearing his school uniform.

His mother, droop shouldered, and wearing an unreadable expression.

His sister had a scowl on her face, with her eyes narrowed and arms crossed.

And above all, his father had a grim and stern expression that he had only seen a few times in the eighteen years of his life. Something horrible had happened to his family. That was the only thing he understood.

Although they must have noticed that Yasuo had returned home, not one of them raised their heads to acknowledge his presence. This strange behaviour indicated how serious the unknown problem was.

This morning, he had woken up as usual to the same old nagging, argued with his sister as usual over trivial things, laughed at the comments of the performer who appeared on the morning news, said goodbye to his father who was leaving for work from the living room without even turning around, and left for school before his sister. That scene had suddenly turned heavy for some reason, and Yasuo couldn't bear it any longer.

"What on earth happened....."

The moment he tried to say that,

“Sit down, Yasuo.”

At his father’s restrained voice, Yasuo’s premonition solidified into certainty.

As he made to sit down in his usual seat opposite his father and beside his sister, Yasuo realized that his heart had started to beat chaotically like an alarm bell.

“...Yes...”

Looking at the complicated sigh that his sister, Nodoka, gave from the corner of his eye only served to aggravate his unease.

“M-Mom, what’s the matter...?”

“...I’m sorry. This is too sudden, I can’t be the one to say it.”

His mother, Madoka’s voice was very hoarse, maybe due to exhaustion.

It seemed that the answer would only come from the person in front of him.

Yasuo gulped and looked at his father’s face.

At some point he had become the same height his father, but for some reason, his father looked especially large and far away today.

That appearance of his father began to speak.

“Yasuo, actually,”

As expected, his father’s voice was just as hoarse and dry as his mother’s. However, his father’s expression had a certain ‘resolve’ that his mother didn’t have.

Yasuo, who was having all sorts of bad premonitions, strengthened his heart against any kind of news and waited for his father’s next words.

The most likely things were the news of illness, injury, or death of a relative. If it was something related directly to his family, perhaps

his father had lost his job, or had some serious illness. Maybe it was a large debt, an accident, or they were the victim of a crime.

As Yasuo began to run through a list of all the bad things that could be imagined by a third-year high school student, his father's next words fell upon his ears.

"I want to go to another world, and become a hero."

The moment it took him to understand the words of his father, Kenzaki Hideo, a forty eight-year old salaryman, seemed like an eternal silence.

"Huh?"

That was the only response he could give. How else was he supposed to react?

".....Huh?"

CHAPTER 1

HIDEO'S SAGA

As before, only the humming sound of the refrigerator echoed in the living room.

Speaking of Yasuo, he was just sitting in front of his father with his mouth open, unable to comprehend even a part of what his father had said.

“...What?”

“What do you mean by ‘what’?”

“Umm, Dad, can you repeat what you just said?”

It's not that he didn't hear what was said. He had just lost the thread of the conversation because what he heard was so far removed from the sort of troubles he had steeled himself for.

“You want to go *where*? To do *what*? ”

“It's like I said.”

His father probably didn't expect to be questioned in return, so he had a discomfited look as he cleared his throat and repeated his words.

“I said, I want to go to another world, and become a Hero.”

“Wait a minute. I heard you properly this time, but I still didn't understand a single word.”

“What don't you understand?”

His father asked with a slightly annoyed expression, but the only answer he could give was that he didn't understand any of it. In any case, Yasuo ignored his father and desperately tried to extract the meaning of “Another world” and “Hero” from his general knowledge as a high school student, accumulated over the eighteen

years of his life.

“Isekai... ise... ise... Ise? And the ‘kai’ is... the ocean? The ocean near Ise? The Mie Prefecture?” |1|

“Hmm?”

“Oh, I get it now. So you’re being transferred for work?”

“Transferred? Ah, yes, I guess you could put it that way.”

“Ah, I see. Now, for ‘Yuusha’... yuu and sha... yuu... a merger, and a company? A company merger... Oh, so that’s how it is. There’s a merger happening in the Mie Prefecture, so you’re being sent there?” |2|

Yasuo’s mind was still somewhat paralyzed, and by the time he had realized it, he was spouting such words. At this frenzied answer that he had arrived at while attempting to return his racing thoughts to normal, his father made a puzzled face.

“What on Earth are you talking about?”

“That’s...”

Just as he was about to reflexively reply, ‘That’s what I want to ask you!’, he heard the sound of a toilet being flushed, coming from outside the room.

“!?”

Yasuo jumped and turned his head towards the door so quickly that it was in danger of flying off his neck. All of the family members were in this room. So, who was using the toilet?

Just as he was about to ask that question, Yasuo realized something. The other three people weren’t surprised at the sound of the toilet flush. Which meant, they knew who was in the bathroom.

“Is there a guest in the house?”

He asked that question to the room at large, but no one replied.

Instead, he heard the sound of someone walking on the

floorboards of the hallway, and the clinking sound of metal surfaces hitting each other. Could it be that the toilet was blocked and they had called a plumber to fix it, in spite of this situation?

That was the only reason he could think of for that sound. When the person making that sound opened the door to the living room, this time, Yasuo was at a loss for words, stopped breathing, and even his mind went blank.

“I’m sorry for leaving in the middle of the conversation. I’ve never used a flush toilet before. It seems very convenient. ”

While the family members were all being strangely flustered, an unknown girl wearing light armour put on an apologetic expression and made a comment regarding the usability of flush toilets.



If there was someone who would not be confused at this situation, he must be a god.

The girl who had dropped Yasuo into such a fearsome state of confusion noticed his presence and her face lit up.

“Ah! You must be-!”

“Huh!?”

As Yasuo continued to be confused, the mysterious girl quickly came close enough for him to be able to feel her breath, grabbed his hand and said with shining eyes,

“So, you are Hideo’s son, Yasuo, right?”

“Eh? Huh? Ehh?”

“I knew it as soon as I saw you. You’ve inherited that look from Hideo, you have such courageous features!”

“Umm, ok... Ehh?”

His relatives often said that he resembled his father at his age, but he had never heard anyone praise him so eloquently and courteously, so his confusion just increased.

“I’m sorry for making you take the time to listen to me, in spite of your important schedule! Thank you for accepting me into your house, in spite of appearing unannounced!”

“.....Sure.”

His didn’t even know what to do anymore.

He was supposed to attend prep school after school today, but he took a day off. At around 4:00 PM, right after school had ended, he received a message from his mother on the messaging application, 『ROPE』, to come home as soon as possible.

Since the message said to forget about prep school and come home right away, he sent a message to his prep school that he would be absent that day and came home only to find this situation, so his

head was overheating.

Unlike Yasuo who was confused, the unknown young lady suddenly recovered her wits and corrected her posture while blushing.

“I’m sorry! I acted so rudely without even introducing myself!”

“No, that’s okay....”

Yasuo’s expression stiffened after seeing that she was kneeling next to his chair while he had been spacing out.

“Umm...?”

After seeing a bonafide kneeling that he had only seen in historical dramas, Yasuo partly rose from his chair.

“I’m from a different dimension, specifically, the Resteria Kingdom on the world of Ante Lande. My name is Dianaze Krone, and I’m a Magitech soldier. I’ve come here as an envoy to summon the legendary hero, Kenzaki Hideo-dono, who is the hero of salvation.”

Yasuo had remained frozen in his half-standing position since the speech began.

There’s that word again, ‘Isekai’. What’s more, it’s called Ante Lande.

“I was just explaining the situation to the family members of the Hero, Hideo, but we were waiting for you to return before going into the details, Yasuo.”

Yasuo just noticed that this girl who looked like she had jumped out of a game, Dia-whatever her name was, had blonde hair and green eyes.

She was definitely not from Japan. However, she was speaking fluent Japanese, without an accent. She was also the most beautiful girl Yasuo had ever seen, which caused him to get even more flustered. He finally stood up properly and shook his head.

“Umm, what does an employee of a theme park from the Mie Prefecture want with my dad? We’ve never gone to Mie, even during our family vacations. B-By the way, please stand up. There’s a stain over there that looks like it came from soy sauce...”

“Excuse me?”

The girl with the beautiful hair color blinked at Yasuo’s response.

“Umm, has Yasuo not heard anything about the situation yet?”

Well, he had heard something which sounded like Japanese, and yet made no sense.

The girl was still kneeling even though he had asked her to stand up, and gave off an air of bewilderment. However, Yasuo was still far ahead of her in his degree of confusion. It hadn’t even been ten minutes since he came back home, and there were already so many things that couldn’t be explained by common sense.

“Well, both of you take a seat for now. Diana-chan, can you start explaining from the beginning again? Yasuo still doesn’t understand the situation.”

“It’s not just a matter of ‘understanding’ ...”

“Ah, okay. I understand. I’ll take a seat, then.”

Yasuo’s father wasn’t able to watch the scene any longer, so he stepped up and sent a lifeboat to Yasuo. However Yasuo wasn’t able to recognize it as a boat, and the young lady wearing light armor meekly stood up as asked while looking at Yasuo’s face, and what’s more, seeing her sit at the head of the table like it was only natural made him feel like he was going crazy. Also, his father had shortened her name and was referring to her by some sort of nickname...

“Ahem. Well then, let me introduce myself again. Yasuo, Nodoka, my name is Dianaze Krone. People who are close to me call me Diana. Please feel free to call me that as well.”

“Okay...”

“.....”

Yasuo gave a dazed answer, and Nodoka didn't look at her even though she was spoken to.

“I assume you are confused by this sudden turn of events, and I sympathise with you. However, the matter is urgent, so we would like to begin summoning the Hero, Hideo, as soon as possible.”

“Um, hang on for a second, please stop right there.”

Although Yasuo looked to be the same age as her, the girl called Dia-whatever, now known as Diana, had a mature air about her that couldn't be compared to him. Yasuo stopped her from speaking and asked in an unsure voice,

“To start with... what do you mean by ‘The Hero, Hideo’?”

Of course, Yasuo knew what the word ‘Hero’ meant. It was a job or title that often popped up in manga, novels, and games, and was usually awarded to the protagonist or a similarly important person. It has the connotation of simply meaning ‘A brave person’, but judging from what Diana had said so far, the ‘Hero’ she was talking about seemed like someone who wielded overwhelming power in a fantasy world, defeated monsters by the dozens, and saved humanity from destruction.

However, coming to that deduction and accepting the phrase ‘The Hero, Hideo’ were different matters. Diana still continued to speak like there was nothing wrong.

“Exactly what it sounds like. It is a title given by the people to praise the person who saved Ante Lande by repelling the all-encompassing darkness. The Hero of Salvation and the Holy Swordsman of the Wind, Hideo Kenzaki.”

Hideo Kenzaki. There was no doubt, that was his father's name. However, she said some words that made no sense again. What the heck is a ‘Holy Swordsman of the Wind’?

“I personally find that name to be kind of embarrassing.”

And the person under discussion, Hideo Kensaki, was uncharacteristically blushing after hearing Diana’s serious words. Yasuo wished he’d shut up as he was only making the discussion more complicated, and besides, if he was embarrassed at being called the ‘The Holy Swordsman of the Wind’, he should have been showing a thousand times more shame than he was now.

“This happened more than thirty years ago. The people of Ante Lande were facing an unprecedented crisis. The world was almost destroyed by the invasion of an army from the Demon World, under the command of the Demon King Kaul.”

“Okay. Demon King Kaul...”

That makes sense. The enemy of the Hero is the Demon King. Yasuo accepted that without really believing it.

“The humans were being defeated continuously, and the world had almost fallen into despair, when Hideo Kenzaki appeared like a comet cutting through the night sky. He singlehandedly defeated the forces of General Belial, one of Kaul’s subordinates, who was about to attack my home country, the Resteria Kingdom. It is said that even the people who had witnessed that sight doubted their eyes afterwards.”

“Ah, no, that’s an exaggeration. I just went on a rampage without knowing what was going on. In the end, I would have definitely died if not for the Erijina... your mother’s help.”

“Mother told me that you would probably say that, Hideo. She also told me that your valiant fighting is what roused the spirits of the Kingdom’s Knights.”

“Haha, thanks. Hearing about the old days again is really embarrassing.”

Yasuo felt that his head was spinning as he heard his father and Diana talking like old friends in game-like terms.

“...And?”

“After that, many people assembled under Hideo, including the person he mentioned earlier, my mother Erijina who was the leader of the Mage Squad. At the end of their journey filled with trials, they defeated the Demon King Kaul. Hideo then returned to this world, but people from all over Ante Lande still praise the efforts of Hideo, and continue to pass on the legend of Hideo Kenzaki.”

“The legend of Hideo Kenzaki? You can’t be serious.”

That retort slipped out of his mouth, but no one could blame him for that.

“That’s really exaggerated, I didn’t do anything that grand...”

“Stop being bashful, Dad! I wasn’t talking about that anyways!”

“But the shadow of Demon King Kaul is once again trying to cover Ante Lande. We don’t know if he has come back after being defeated thirty years ago. However, the situation calls for immediate action. Hideo Kenzaki is still the only person strong enough to fight against Demon King Kaul. Under orders from my mother Erijina, who now commands the Kingdom’s Knights, I have come to Japan to once again ask for Hideo’s assistance.”

“I see...”

Since the conversation had gone on for quite some time, Yasuo was still confused, but he was now able to follow the thread of the conversation. So basically, whatever bad things that had happened in that place called Ante Lande in the past were once again beginning to occur.

To resolve that issue, they needed his father’s help. That much, he understood. But...

“So, that’s how it is? You’re talking about some MMO that is popular all over the world, right? I can see you’ve put a lot of effort into your cosplay, and it’s surprising that my dad knows people abroad, and a young girl at that. So there’s going to be an offline

meeting of players from all over the world, and you've come to attend that meeting while taking a tour of Japan? Your Japanese is really good, too..."

In that way, Yasuo said such things while wishing for them to be true. Rather than his father or Diana, he said it for the sake of his mother and Nodoka.

However, Diana was truly confused by what Yasuo was saying, and looked at Hideo for help. Hideo let out a long and deep sigh.

"Your reaction is not really surprising, but enough joking around, Yasuo. This is a serious matter."

"‘Serious’? Look, Dad, I’m sorry if I’ve hurt your feelings, but you mean that like games are not just for fun, right? Ever since I started attending prep school, I’ve only played games on my Slimphone, I haven’t done any serious gaming that requires a PC..."

"Yasuo."

That heavy, single word from his father forestalled the rest of Yasuo’s unexpectedly shrill answer. It was the same tone he had used in the past when Yasuo was scolded for playing a prank.

"It seems like Ante Lande is in serious trouble. Even if nothing bad happens today or tomorrow, there’s no guessing what kind of bad things will happen within half a year. I plan on accepting this request."

"What... are you saying...?"

"I can’t say anything for certain until I go there and talk to her mother, and see the situation for myself. However, if Kaul’s presence is indeed starting to eat away at that world once again, I probably won’t be able to come back easily. That’s why..."

Hideo locked gazes with his son as if attempting to convey the depth of his resolve.

"I’m going to quit my job, and go to Ante Lande."

“W-Wait just a minute! What are you saying all of a sudden?”

He was willing to dismiss all the things until now as a bad joke. But at this statement, he couldn't stay silent.

Basically, this sentence was a lot more realistic to Yasuo compared to the words of Diana who appeared to be a teenager.

“You’re going to quit your job? You can’t be serious. What are we going to do from now on if you quit!?”

“.....”

Nodoka looked at her shouting brother with a dull expression, but Yasuo didn't notice that.

“I would understand if you were being transferred because of your job, and had to live apart from us for that reason. But quitting your job because of a game, that’s not acceptable in these times! Do you even understand what you’re saying!?”

“Yasuo, it’s not a game. I’m being serious.”

“There’s not a single person who would believe that! I don’t understand you at all! You always warn us to not play too many games and stuff, and now you’re ditching your family because of a game!?”

“Yasuo, about that...”

“Think about it again! It’s not normal to quit your job for a thing like this! Do you understand? Both Nodoka and I have entrance exams this year. Depending on what school we get into, it’ll cost a fair bit of money, and besides, quitting a job that you’ve been working at until you’re nearly fifty years old is unheard of!”

Yasuo went on a rant, his excitement causing the blood flow to his head to reduce. However, the stiff atmosphere in that place did not change.

His mother was still sitting silently with a serious expression on her face, Nodoka was shrugging with a stunned expression, and the

main person, his father, didn't show any hint of wavering after hearing his son's words.

Hideo worked for a company called Yamahata. It was a company that had seen a sudden rise in popularity among women, due to publishing a diet recipe book that overturned the conventional practices.

Yasuo didn't know any details about what his father did at work. However, there was a time when he mentioned his father's company name in a discussion with friends about their parents' jobs, and even girls he usually didn't talk to were suddenly very interested, and this incident left a strange impression on him. After that, he sat down and did some proper research and found out that they sold recipie books and books related to the retail business.

Later, he finally remembered talking to his father about this, and he initially assumed that the company produced foodstuffs, but he was astonished to learn that their real business was actually the development and sale of measurement devices.

His father held some managerial position there, with a western name that he didn't really understand. By not understanding, he meant that he didn't know if it was a head of a section or a head of a department, it didn't correspond with any of the usual Japanese designations. Combined with the fact that his father didn't usually talk about his work at home, there weren't many opportunities for Yasuo to learn more.

Regardless of that, he still knew that it was too soon for his father to retire from work. Considering their lifestyle, and from hearing snatches of conversation as his father spoke over the phone, he also knew that his father was in a considerably important position in the company.

Quitting such a job for the sake of some weird game was definitely not something a sane person would do.

“It'll be fine.”

However, Hideo looked straight at his son and daughter as though trying to say how strong his determination was.

“The loan on the house has already been paid up in full. Even if both of you want to go to a private college, we still have enough savings for that, and to help with your wedding ceremonies as well.”

“I’m not talking about stuff like that!!”

“It can’t be helped. I’m too old to take a sabbatical. I can’t move around like I used to anymore, and I can’t very well keep my job when I have no idea when I’ll be able to return.”

Taking early retirement due to health issues was not that strange for a middle-aged salaryman, but having a reason like ‘going to another world to be a hero’ sounded strange no matter how you looked at it.

Diana, who was dismayed by Yasuo’s anger, interjected with a comment as if trying to soothe the atmosphere.

“Umm, we have taken into account the fact that Hideo might have formed a family during these last thirty years. During the period when Hideo is absent, The Resteria Kingdom will take full responsibility for the well-being of the family-”

However, what she said only irritated Yasuo even more.

“You be quiet! The currency from an MMO can’t be used to buy food, nor can it be used to pay for school! Besides, it’s not really a matter of money anymore!”

“B-But what I’m talking about is real! G-Games are a type of entertainment in this world, right? I’m not talking about playing around, this is a serious-”

“Didn’t I tell you to shut up!?”

“Uu...!”

At Yasuo’s loudest shout so far, Diana shook like a child who has

been scolded, and stopped talking while looking like she was about to cry.

“Onii-chan, you’re being noisy.”

“The window in the kitchen is open. I’ll go close it.”

After hearing what his sister and mother said, Yasuo felt a twinge of guilt and a sense of unease. Since earlier, he was the only one who had been chewing out his father in a loud voice. How were his mother and Nodoka able to stay calm after hearing something so idiotic?

Yasuo felt an unpleasant sense of impatience, but he was able to calm down a little after looking around the room once.

“...Say, Dad. I don’t know what working in a company is like, but wouldn’t the other people be inconvenienced if you were to quit?”

“Well, yeah, that’s true.”

Seeing a hint of wavering in his father’s expression for the first time, Yasuo continued to press him for answers without any delay.

“The same goes for us. Especially Nodoka, who is taking an entrance exam for the first time, and what are we supposed to say if the neighbors ask about you?”

“I do feel sorry about that. Having to do something like this even though it is an important time for you two...”

His father’s words depressed words and defeated appearance just made Yasuo more irritated.

What’s more, from beside Yasuo,

“I’m not that worried about my exams, actually.”

“I wonder if there are any neighbors who will ask about your father...”

Hearing the words of Nodoka and his mother that seemed like they were supporting his father, Yasuo once again got angry.

“If you understand, stop talking about such nonsense! Games are just games! Your son and daughter have entrance exams this year, you know? And yet you still want to quit your job because of some game?”

In contrast to Yasuo’s anger, his father’s expression just got more sorrowful.

“Yasuo! It’s not a game! Ante Lande is not a world from some game or manga! It really exists, and I spent two years there, and gained many important friends and comrades! I’m here thanks to those people. If they are once again in danger, I want to help them!”

“How do you expect me to believe something like that!?”

At that point, Yasuo finally calmed down.

Yasuo knew that his father was being serious. However, the conversation was too absurd.

He wasn’t young enough to believe in things like the existence of different worlds and Demon Kings without question.

Besides, regardless of the circumstances, it was not okay for a man to abruptly bring a strange girl over and talk about quitting his job and leaving his wife, a son in his third year of high school, and a daughter in her third year of middle school behind while he went somewhere far away. If he didn’t stop him, then they couldn’t even be considered a family.

However, his father’s expression indicated that he was resolved to do just that. That’s why, Yasuo wanted to stop his father’s insanity, no matter what kind of oppressive, rude, and dirty words he had to use.

“.....”

“Hideo.....”

However, even Yasuo’s shout failed to move his father’s heart. After looking at Diana, Hideo looked like he had become even more

resolute, and stood up slowly.

“Right now, I cannot prove that Ante Lande exists. However, I can show you proof that I was a Hero, ‘The Holy Swordsman of the Wind’. I hope that will be enough to satisfy you.”

“Huh? P-Proof?”

As Yasuo started to get a headache due to his confusion, his father slowly moved away from the table.

“.....It’s been a while, my other half.”

His father slowly raised his arms up to eye level. In that instant, a gust of wind blew through the living room even though the windows were closed and the AC was switched off, and both Yasuo and Nodoka opened their eyes wide.

“My name is Hideo! The person who will obtain victory for new frontiers! Wings, go forth! Flower petals, take flight! Gather the shining azure sunlight! Avatar of the wind, Holy Sword Liutberga! Answer my call and take form!”

This was hardly the kind of thing a middle-aged salaryman who was nearly fifty years old should be chanting, but Yasuo and Nodoka were unable to look away from their father’s hands.

A bright blue light, brighter than an LED flashlight was coalescing within Hideo’s hands.

“Woah!”

After an especially strong gust of wind, the light faded and their father was holding a sword in his hand.

“Aah, now look what you’ve done.”

“T-That was surprising.”

While Yasuo was frozen from shock, his mother who had been silent until now rose from her chair and started to pick up the things that were scattered around by the wind that his father had apparently summoned. Even Nodoka was showing a shocked

expression.

The picture frames that were on top of the cupboard had fallen down, the framed paintings on the walls were tilted to one side, the box of tissues that was on the table had got blown into a corner of the room, and even the tablecloth had been blown up by the wind. The figure of his mother, Madoka, efficiently fixing all these things appeared to be out of touch with reality, maybe because she saw something so extraordinary. His father looked a little sad as he closed his eyes.

“I didn’t intend to show all of you so much.”

“Amazing... so this is the legendary Holy Sword of the Wind, Liutberga.”

Unlike Yasuo and Nodoka who were dumbfounded, Diana had a look of awe upon her face.

“I’ve gotten rusty. Back in the old days, I didn’t need the chant, and the sword didn’t look so flimsy either.”

The sword that was polished to mirror finish gave off a faint blue glow, and seemed to leave afterimages in Yasuo’s eyes as it moved.

What did he just see? Magic? There was no other way to put it, but Yasuo still couldn’t believe what he had seen.

“Is that some sleight of hand? Something like Diana-san secretly handed you that thing which looks like a cosplay prop while you were distracting us with the light.”

Nodoka proposed a very realistic explanation after glancing at her brother who was confused as to whether it was really magic or not, after seeing the unreal scene before him.

Yasuo was astonished at his sister’s composure and was about to agree with her theory, but then reconsidered. That was because Diana hadn’t been carrying such a long sword anywhere on her person.

The sword in front of them had a metallic sheen, and didn't look like a prop that was built with some trick in the materials or structure.

"Do you want to hold it?"

Hideo was not in the least worried about Nodoka's theory, and handed the sword that seemed to be called Liutberga to Nodoka, hilt first.

"Eh? Can I?"

Nodoka asked back in a simple manner, like a child who had been allowed to hold the belongings of an adult.

"It's okay. This is my holy sword. It won't hurt any of my family members."

Unlike Nodoka's simple question, her father's answer was so serious that it almost seemed unnatural.

"....."

In spite of that, Nodoka cautiously stretched her hand out towards the proffered hilt and made to hold the sword, but:

"Woah!"

Nodoka certainly held the sword. But the second it passed into her hands completely, the sword started to turn into particles of light and disappeared from the point first, as though it was dissolving into thin air.

Once the sword had completely disintegrated, the particles irregularly moved back into Hideo's hand and turned back into a sword in the blink of an eye.

"I was definitely holding it just now... Wow, that's pretty awesome!"

"Yasuo, do you want to try holding it too?"

Yasuo frowned at his sister who looked like she was having fun in

spite of her confusion, and stretched his hand towards the hilt as well. However, just like before, the sword disintegrated into particles of light before Yasuo could hold it properly and returned to Hideo's hand.

The feeling of holding a slender, metallic item remained in Yasuo's hand. For a moment, he also felt its weight. However, he also felt that it was far too light to have been constructed entirely out of metal, and also felt the sensation of the blade slowly vanishing in his hands, just ten centimeters in front of his nose.

"Not considering Ante Lande, I hope you've come to understand that at least I'm not normal."

"...Why..."

Although it was very vague, his father accurately understood the question that was within Yasuo's groan.

"I didn't want you to hate me. I didn't want to scare you. Swords and magic are not normal things. The fact that your father is not normal, when I considered what effect that knowledge would have on you, I was too scared to tell you."

Yasuo wasn't able to confidently say that it wouldn't have been the case. If he had found out about this earlier, could he have continued to interact with his father normally?

There's no way he could have done that. Even now, he was in such a state.

Even without considering the matter of being a hero and other worlds, his father had just demonstrated something that couldn't be explained by common sense. There's no way he could discover how to react to this matter in the few seconds that had elapsed.

At this point, Yasuo finally felt that something outrageous and incredible was happening in front of him. Yasuo, Nodoka, and even Hideo were unable to say anything, and just looked at each other for a while.

The incredible secret of their family was now revealed. Such a thing had never happened in the Kenzaki household before.

None of them knew what was to be done. Even Diana could do little more than just look on while being tense.

“Say, Dad.”

A gentle voice broke the taut silence.

“Both Yasuo and Nodoka won’t be able to come to terms with it so quickly after hearing such a story. Why don’t we take a break and talk again after while?”

“Hmm? Ahh, you’re right. Let’s do that.”

“Mom?”

Their mother, Madoka, had returned after fixing all the things that had fallen over or were blown away by the wind summoned by their father.

“I know you two are confused, but your father is actually worried because of this sudden development as well. Let’s stop talking about this for today, and set a time for discussing this again later. We can afford to take at least that much time, right, Diana-chan?”

“Eh? Ah, yes, if it’s just that much...”

Diana’s reply was a moment late as she didn’t expect to be asked a question.

“Then we’re done for today. Diana-chan, do you have any place where you can stay for the night?”

“Well, umm, no, I don’t...”

Diana replied while looking at Yasuo timidly.

“I expected to take Hideo back with me by the end of today, so...”

“There’s no helping it then. You can stay in my room for today. We have a futon for guests as well, although it hasn’t been used in a while so it may be a little dusty.”

“Ah, thank you very much-”

“Mom, wait. Wait just a minute. You seem weirdly calm, are you okay with this?”

Yasuo forcefully entered the conversation between his mother and Diana.

“About the talk regarding holy swords and the different world, How do you feel about all this?”

“Even if you ask me how I feel...”

Yasuo’s mother looked back at him with an expression that could be taken as being baffled, expressionless, or just trying not to think about it.

“Dad just said that he wants to quit his job for some incomprehensible reason.”

His mother was an avid reader, and was proud of her book collection that had works from many genres, but the only fantasy books she had were the typical foreign books that were made into movies.

Maybe she was silent all this time because she wasn’t able to keep up with the conversation, and in the end she had on an expressionless face as if she had closed herself off from the discussion.

It wasn’t clear whether she understood what Yasuo was worried about, but she lowered her shoulders and spoke with her eyes cast downwards after first looking at Hideo and then at Diana.

“Of course, I don’t want your father to quit his job either. Although we have savings, we don’t know what will happen in the future. One of us could get into an accident, fall ill, or something else might happen.”

“R-Right? See, Mom agrees with me-”

“But I also understand why your father wants to go, and so I’m not

able to strongly disagree. I don't know what to do either."

"Can't strongly disagree with Dad quitting his job... wait, what do you mean?"

Looking at her son who was confused, Madoka looked at Diana like she had given up on everything and asked her,

"Diana-chan, does Erijina... no, Erize, still dislike eating carrots?"

"Huh?"

At this, Yasuo, and even Nodoka, gave a startled shout.

On the other hand, Diana smiled a little and gave a small nod.

"Yes. Every year, she imposes exorbitant taxes only on carrots to keep them from the markets, and the Emperor reprimands her for that. It's become something of a custom."

"She hasn't changed at all. Alex must be having a hard time as well."

"Yes, my father... my father was very strict while raising me to not complain about food. Thanks to that, I became capable of eating most things."

"Eh, Mom, are you serious?"

"Wait a second!"

"Who's this Alex?"

"Wait, are you kidding me?"

As the brother and sister asked their mother these questions while trying to make sense of the situation, their mother placed her index finger near her mouth as though asking them to calm down.

"Your father and I fought together in Ante Lande, and fell in love with each other."

She said that while creating a small flame above the tip of that index finger.

This time, Yasuo was truly lost for words.

While he was in that state, the flame that was created on top of his mother's finger gradually changed in size and shape, and finally took on a spherical shape in mid-air as though it was enclosed in a crystal ball, and looked like a small sun that shone in the colors of the rainbow.

"I'm very thankful. To think that I would be able to see the magic of Sugiura Madoka, who was known as the 'Rainbow Sage', with my own eyes. As a Magitech soldier, I feel very lucky."

Unlike Yasuo and Nodoka who were unable to make a sound, Diana looked at Kenzaki Madoka, known as Sugiura Madoka before marriage, with admiration, just like she had looked at the Holy Sword Liutberga earlier.

Nodoka was even more surprised than she was with the so-called Holy Sword from earlier, and showed a childlike expression for once while looking at the flame that was continuously changing in shape and color while hovering over her mother's finger.

"Woah, seriously? It's so pretty... wow!?"

However, at that moment, the fire alarm on the ceiling started to make a loud noise, and their mother hurriedly covered the miniature rainbow sun with both hands and made it vanish. While pulling the string that would stop the alarm, she said,

"Am I still called by that embarrassing nickname over there? Seriously, Diana-chan. Forget about being a sage, I'm just an old lady who didn't even go to college. If you praise me for such a small thing, Erize who has been the leader of the Mage Squad of the Kingdom's Knights for all these years will become jealous."

"My mother is too overconfident. It would be good for her to learn a little humility."

Diana was praising his mother, while his mother was trying to be humble but didn't look displeased. Yasuo didn't even know what to

do anymore.

Maybe because she noticed that look on her son's face, she shrugged and looked at her husband and Diana.

"I understand your desire to help the people you were indebted to in Ante Lande. I, too have many memories of that place, and I was saved by the people there many times, and if I could do something, I would want to. But we're old now and can't fight like we did back then, and Yasuo and Nodoka are at an important stage in life. We don't know how much money we will need in the future. That is why... I still can't tell you what I think you should do."

If this was a nightmare, he wanted to wake up already.

What was with this scene?

His mother was a magician? Sage? Mage Squad? What the heck is that?

How was Nodoka able to listen to such things without batting an eyelid?

Was he the one who was being strange?

The mentality of the eighteen-year old boy who had grown up in a completely normal way had reached its limit.

"Yasuo!?"

"Hey, Yasuo!?"

"Eh? What? Onii-chan, are you for real?"

"Y-Yasuo!?"

Being hit directly with this difficult reality, Yasuo couldn't take it anymore and fell down, unconscious.

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Yasuo, who had slept for a long time for once, felt like he had awoken after having a long dream.

"I might have overslept a bit"

While saying that to himself, he stretched his back that felt stiff and climbed down the stairs.

While squinting his eyes against the faint light of the early morning, he saw the back of his father, Hideo, wearing a suit and putting his shoes on near the front door.

“...Hmm? Are you leaving already?”

Yasuo looked at the clock near the front door that had an inbuilt hygrometer and thermometer, and saw that it was only 6:00 AM. It was one hour earlier than his father usually left for work.

“Hmm? Ah, I’m going to Osaka on a business trip for three days. The Shinkansen train leaves pretty early.”

“Oh, I see. Have a good trip.”

It was pretty common for his father to take business trips. The frequency was at least once every month. However, Yasuo didn’t know the exact number. It was just a usual part of his life, and if he didn’t see his father at night, he would just think “Ah, he’s on a business trip.”

“Well then, I’m sorry for leaving all this trouble behind. We’ll continue the discussion after I get back.”

“Hmm? Ah, okay.”

After seeing off his father as he had done many times before, he wondered what trouble his father was talking about. As he struggled to remember while not being fully awake yet, the sound of his stomach due to hunger distracted him.

Speaking of which, he couldn’t remember what he had eaten for dinner last night.

“Ah, did Dad come back late from work yesterday? Hmm, but I think I took a day off from prep school...”

As he was rubbing his half-open eyes, he tried to scratch his stomach through the gap in his pyjamas, but the cloth he touched

felt different from that of his pyjamas, so he looked down at himself.

“Hmm? Woah, what the hell?”

No wonder he felt so uncomfortable while waking up, for some reason he was still wearing his school uniform.

“Eh, did I fall asleep like this yesterday? Ahh, the trousers are so wrinkled. Hey, Mom, yesterday I...”

Yasuo realized that his memories of the previous night were hazy, and as he called out to his mother who was preparing breakfast,

“G-Good morning! I didn’t realize you were already awake! How are you feeling now? I’m sorry, breakfast isn’t ready yet!”

He realized that an unknown young girl was standing in the kitchen, and,

“AAAAAAAAAAAH! Ah!? AAAAAAAAHH!!”

“Kya!?”

The memories of the previous day came rushing back all at once, and he screamed at the top of his lungs.

The one who was standing in the kitchen was the girl who had thrown a massive bomb into the Kenzaki household yesterday, the self-proclaimed outworlder, Diana. He couldn’t remember her full name yet.

“Hey, what’s all the noise about!”

The scream brought his mother running into the living room.

“Yasuo? You’re awake? Are you feeling okay?”

“W-W-W-W-What do you mean, am I okay?”

“I mean, you suddenly fainted yesterday and didn’t wake up at all. I was planning to call the ambulance if you still didn’t wake up in the morning, you know?”

“No, no, that’s not important! Dad just left the house, call him

back!"

"Huh? I already know that. Why do you want to call him back?"

"What do you mean, why? He was talking about quitting his job, right? He might turn in his resignation today before coming home!"

"Calm down a little. Also, you didn't take a bath yesterday, so go take one now. If you can make this much noise, then I guess you're alright."

"How do you expect me to calm down?!"

"You look pretty relaxed already, sitting on the floor like that. Don't worry, he's just gone on his usual business trip to Osaka. No matter how firm his resolve is, he can't just up and quit his job in one day. I've also properly warned him to not be hasty."

"I-Is that so?"

Yasuo wasn't able to calm down, and he glared at Diana while still being in the pathetic position of sitting on the floor.

Seeing that, Diana knelt on the floor in front of Yasuo.

"Umm, I slept in Madoka's room last night, and I realized that I was very inconsiderate towards all the family members, so I thought we could begin the conversation again on another day..."

Unlike yesterday, she wasn't wearing light armour that gave off a fantasy-like feeling, and was instead wearing a blouse that he assumed belonged to his mother. Since Diana, who was less than twenty years old and had blonde hair and green eyes, was wearing a blouse belonging to his mother, who was nearly fifty years old, he couldn't shake off the feeling that it was really mismatched.

However, since the clothing was of a style that was ordinary, he was able to keep from adversely reacting to her like he did yesterday. Putting that absurd discussion aside, it seemed that she really felt sorry towards Yasuo.

"Ah, um, okay."

But that didn't mean that he suddenly wanted to be friends with her.

In the end, Yasuo only gave a halfhearted answer, and wasn't able to think of anything else to say. It was then that the door to the living room opened suddenly and hit him hard on his back and the back of his head, as he was still sitting on the floor.

“Ahh!?”

“Woah!?”

Nodoka's startled cry was heard from the other side of the door, and she peeked in with an unhappy face and looked at Yasuo who was in pain with cold eyes.

“...Thanks to your shouting, I woke up at an hour when I could have still been sleeping, Onii-chan.”

“I-Isn't there something you should say to me before that....”

“The door bounced back and hit my toes, it really hurts. Why are you blocking the way by lying down in such a place?”

“Ehh, what's up with that?”

While Diana was looking at Yasuo who was groaning in pain, Nodoka sleepily looked at Diana and greeted her normally while yawning slightly.

“Ah, good morning, Diana-san.”

“Good morning, Nodoka. Umm, Yasuo made a really loud noise...”

Diana naturally exchanged morning greetings with Nodoka, and looked at Yasuo who was holding his head while writhing in pain as if she was uncertain as to how to interact with him.

“You can just leave him be. Mom, can I have some black tea?”

However, Nodoka just talked like she didn't even consider her brother to be human, like she did everyday from the moment she woke up.

“I-Is that really okay? Ah, if you want tea, the pot that boils water quickly is heating up right now.”

“Ah, the electric kettle? I hope you haven’t actually put it on the stove.”

After thinking for a second, Nodoka realized that Diana was talking about the electric kettle used to heat water. Heading towards the kitchen, she walked in between Diana and Yasuo.

“Wha... Eh?”

Yasuo sat up while rubbing his head, but wasn’t able to conceal his misgivings at Nodoka’s behaviour.

It wasn’t that she was being friendly towards Diana. However, she was tolerating Diana’s presence as though she was a distant relative who had come to visit, and wasn’t as uncomfortable with having her around as Yasuo was.

“Well, it’s not that I don’t understand what you want to say.”

At some point, his mother had come to stand beside him and said so while looking downwards while having a complicated expression.

“Go get changed. You have another uniform shirt to change into, right?”

Even those words, which he would normally hear many times in a month, felt like they were coming from a distant place.

The atmosphere in the dining room turned even worse than it was yesterday.

Since the main person, his father, wasn’t here, Diana’s presence felt even more abnormal. Diana, too, seemed to feel the tense atmosphere around Yasuo, and just nibbled her toast without saying anything.

After that, Yasuo took a shower, took a fresh shirt out of his wardrobe, ironed his trousers even though he didn’t really know

how, and prepared to leave for school. He focused on the toast and salad in front of him to avoid looking at Diana as much as possible, even though he couldn't avoid seeing her completely.

“...Such a tense atmosphere.”

Only Madoka said that in an unhappy manner.

“I know it's asking too much for all of you all to get along in just a day, but why don't we at least turn on the TV?”

Although she seemed to be asking for permission, his mother had already taken the remote control and turned the TV on.

Ah, this way he could just look at the TV and avoid having to look at Diana. Even he felt that this was being too rude, but the moment he started to think that:

“There are people inside that plank!?”

He heard Diana's astonished words and had a coughing fit.

“Eh? Ah, I'm sorry! Did I just say something weird?”

“N-No.”

Since he wasn't able to believe the supernatural things his parents had shown him yesterday, he was also unable to believe that Diana was from another world.

“Are you seriously asking that?”

Nodoka, who had been eating her breakfast at her own pace without caring about the tense atmosphere, asked this question. It couldn't be denied that she had lost some of her reproachful tone, but her tone was slightly friendlier.

“She probably is. Even yesterday, she tried to turn off the fluorescent lamp before sleeping by removing the cover.”

“Huh?”

“N-No, I just thought it was a very bright candle, or a light created by magic....”

Nodoka automatically looked upwards at the light on the ceiling of the living room. It was a familiar sight, so she rarely looked at it directly. She saw what appeared to be dust and a dead insect inside the lamp, and thought that it hadn't been cleaned in a while.

“...You’re joking, right?”

“Ah, no, I’m really not joking or anything.”

Nodoka asked her as if to confirm the fact, but Diana hurriedly gave an excuse.

“Ah, I heard my mother talking about things that Hideo and Madoka had told her, regarding box-like devices that showed moving people, and devices that projected light onto a large surface, so I was really surprised.”

Diana was upset and looked like she was about to start crying.

“Hey.”

Seeing that, Nodoka for some reason looked more reproachful, and nudged Yasuo’s elbow.

Although she didn’t say it aloud, she was signalling him to not make Diana cry over pointless stuff as it would be troublesome.

Yasuo too, had noticed that Diana’s eyes were a bit teary, and looked away because he suddenly felt uncomfortable.

“Ah, so you already knew about the existence of television.”

Yasuo’s attitude indicated that he was feeling stressed as he had lost his aggressive emotional stance, and felt uncomfortable even calling a temporary truce, but Diana looked as if she was relieved that Yasuo’s tense behaviour was dissipating, so she spoke rapidly.

“Y-Yes. I didn’t think it would look like such a thin plank, though.”

“Doesn’t the one in our house still look like a box, though? If only barely.”

The TV in the Kenzaki household was certainly a flat screen

television, but it was a fairly old model. Hence, it was a lot thicker than the latest models.

“Is that so?”

“Yeah, the latest ones are only half as thick as ours, or maybe even less than that.”

“Oh...”

Unlike Yasuo, Nodoka was able to properly have a conversation with Diana about everyday life. Just what was going on here? Did something happen after he had pathetically fainted last night? Judging by Nodoka’s behaviour, did she come to terms with the bizarre things that their dad, mom, and Diana talked about?

Maybe because the question was evident from his expression, Nodoka became aware of Yasuo’s gaze. She put the piece of toast that she was holding back on her plate, and asked Diana in a more formal tone.

“Well, I don’t know how serious you are about the whole thing, but both Onii-chan and I are still confused, so let’s not have a rehash of yesterday’s conversation, okay?”

“Y-Yes. I too feel bad that I impatiently tried to finish the discussion yesterday. This is an important problem for all of you, so I hope we can take some time and gradually discuss this problem....”

Thanks to Diana’s cliched words that would easily win a high rank in a ‘are there people who actually say that?’ contest and Nodoka’s ever-unchanging behaviour, the wintry atmosphere at the dining table reduced a little and it felt like a fresh breeze of spring blew through the room.

While Yasuo was cleaning up the corn from his salad that he had coughed up, he was also closely listening to Diana’s words.

Maybe his mother and Nodoka hadn’t realized the true intent behind Diana’s last statement. Yasuo forced down his feelings along with his breakfast, he left the table without even saying thanks for

the food. Regardless of what his mother and Nodoka were thinking, if he stayed at that place any longer, he would only end up making himself and Diana feel bad, and Nodoka would again try to fix the situation and he would be in her debt.

“...Thanks for the food. Although it’s a little early, I’ll be leaving now.”

The hands of the clock were showing the time was 6:45 AM.

“Oh, really?”

“Hmm, you’re leaving pretty early.”

His mother only looked at him with eyes widened a little in surprise. Nodoka’s words were full of the nuance that she thought he was running away.

True, he would usually spend at least another thirty minutes relaxing, but Yasuo definitely didn’t feel like doing that today. If he spent another thirty minutes with Diana in the atmosphere that was starting to become more friendly, he didn’t know what kind of things he would end up agreeing to.

“I promised to go to the club room before school starts.”

Did anyone detect a lie in his flimsy excuse?

At Yasuo’s high school, morning practice for clubs was only held after receiving permission, before important competitions.

He remembered how his father, Hideo, had been very agitated when Yasuo entered high school, and he found out that there would be no morning practice for clubs.

It’s not that morning practice was forbidden, and clubs that had chances of competing at the national level and clubs that had their dedicated training spaces were not bound by this rule. However, there had been a tendency in recent years to curtail morning practice for clubs that didn’t fall into either of these categories.

“I see.”

Irrespective of that fact, Nodoka appeared to have seen through his intentions. Maybe that was only to be expected.

That's because the club that Yasuo used to belong to no longer existed.

"Ah, please take care..."

As Yasuo left without sparing a single glance at the dining table, only Diana's voice and the small sound caused by moving her chair back as she slightly stood up went after him.

Perhaps she intended to see him off at the door, or she just stood up without thinking about it, but Yasuo didn't intend to talk to her any further even if she came to see him off. Even if he didn't believe in all this stuff about other worlds, Heroes and Demon Kings, he understood that she was the daughter of some old friends of his parents.

However, since she was in a position where she was threatening to disrupt the peace of his family, he had no idea what kind of abusive language he would use on her if she came to see him off. If he did that, there was no doubt that the girl would get depressed and stop talking altogether. He could understand that much even from their brief encounter today morning.

Since Diana appeared to be basically a good person, if he insulted her and caused her to become silent, wouldn't that make him look like the bad guy?

That's why, he was glad that she didn't come running after him. Besides, saying that he had to stop by the club room wasn't a complete lie. It's just that he would kill time at the room that had previously been used by his club.

"Seriously, nothing seems to be going well."

While bathed in the sunlight of a morning that was still a little chilly, Yasuo headed down the road that would take him to Tokorozawa Station of the Seibu Railway.

A good metaphor for Yasuo's highschool life so far would be to say, 'defective, but not damaged enough to bother sending it in for repair'.

He attended a private high school in his area, Takeoka High School, and had a fair number of friends, even though they were all male. As for his studies, in some subjects he was near the top of the school rankings, while in others he was hovering below average and failed a few tests.

For sports, rather than activities like soccer and basketball that would make people popular in his class, he was good at things like racquet sports, judo, and gymnastics that didn't require a team effort.

Although he wasn't the type of person to volunteer for committee work, he would properly take responsibility and finish any work that was assigned to him.

In short, he was definitely not the kind of person who would stand out in his class.

He didn't particularly want to be the star of his class, nor was he the kind of person who would be noticed by the delinquents. He would speak to girls, but he was not really popular.

He had maybe two or three close friends who shared the same interests and hobbies as him, and a bunch of other people who he would tend to hang out with because they either graduated from the same middle school as him, they lived in the same direction while going back from school, or they were in the same class that he was in during the last year.

Although he didn't have what it took to be a star, it appeared that he was living a fairly fulfilling high school life. However, his high school life still lacked something definite, that would make it complete.

On that day, he spent time in his "club room" looking at his SlimPhone until the other students started coming to school, and

once the campus started to get noisy, he headed towards his class, Third-year Class ‘D’.

“Hey.”

“Oh, Yasu. You’re pretty early today.”

Aioi Aoto, a friend since his first year at school, was carrying a bunch of long objects in a cloth bag.

Along with having the last name “Aioi”, Aoto’s birthday was on 4th April, so he always had the first student number in the class. According to him, the only people who could wrest that spot from him were his cousin Aioi Aika, who was born on 3rd April, or a person with the surname “Aiue”, whom he had yet to run into.

“What are those long things? They look heavy.”

“These? They’re katanas.”

“Katanas? Ehh, are they real?”

Yasuo widened his eyes at the unexpected reply, but Aoto shook his head.

“Of course not. They’re just props that are used by my club.”

Saying that, Aoto laughed and put down the bundle of long objects on his desk.

“The person who was President of the club before graduation knew someone who made props like these. Due to that, their house is full of props, so that person pushed them onto us, telling us to use them for the club.”

“Ahh, the Theatre Club?”

“And the Cine Club as well.”

At Takeoka High school, the school that Yasuo and Aoto attend, the Theatre Club and the Cinematics Research Club cooperated with each other and they were rated highly even outside the school. The Theatre Club regularly ranked among the top in the Kanto

region, and the Cinematics Research Club had participated in National-level competitions several times. Aoto belongs to the Theatre Club, and took over as vice-president of the club after the third year students graduated last year.

“Want to take a look?”

Aoto said that, and pulled out one of the katanas from within the traditional-style bag without waiting for Yasuo’s response.

“Oh? What’s with the katana?”

“Woah, it’s a katana. Aioi, can I unsheathe it?”

Seeing that, Igarashi and Hino, who were also classmates and good friends of Yasuo’s, came over to take a look at the four black-painted sheaths that were on the desk, probably because it’s not something you see everyday.

“Sure. But the blades are delicate, so don’t hit them against anything hard.”

Aoto readily handed over one of the katanas to Igarashi, and Igarashi accepted it while being excited.

“It’s so light. This is one of those Takemitsu swords |3|, right? ... Huh, I can’t draw it. Is it because it’s a fake?”

“No, No. It’s built like a real sword, so it’s hard to draw if you don’t loosen the sword in the scabbard first.”

Saying that, Aoto took up one of the other Takemitsu swords, held it on the left side of his waist, and pushed the guard of the sword with his left thumb. When he did that, the base of the sword blade peeked out from the scabbard accompanied by the metallic sound often heard in period dramas, and Aoto drew the blade from the sheath in a single motion.

“Wow!”

Apart from Igarashi and Hino, sounds of delight were also heard from the other boys who had gathered around from curiosity.

However, Yasuo had seen a far more incredible “sword” the previous day, so he didn’t join in.

However, when it was his turn to hold the sword, even Yasuo, who knew nothing about Japanese swords, could tell that the design of the sword felt pretty close to that of a real one.

“It’s pretty light, isn’t it?”

His father’s “Holy Sword” was lighter than this. Yasuo made a noncommittal nod while doing his best to ignore the voice in a corner of his heart that said that.

“But you know, it’s pretty hard to keep brandishing this if you’re not used to it. In the beginning, my arms felt like they were going to fall off after a single day of practice.”

“Oh, really?”

“Yasu, you must have seen a staged sword fight in a period drama, right? In those fights, they have to make it look like they’re striking each other without actually doing hitting anything. So the way they use their muscles is entirely different from just waving the sword around.”

“Oh?”

Yasuo didn’t know much about staged sword fights, so he was again only able to give a halfhearted response. Out of curiosity, he stretched his hand out towards the bag that was close to him to see what other designs of katanas were there.

“Ah, that is...”

Aoto gave a slightly sharp warning, and Yasuo also immediate understood his intent. This sword was obviously heavier than the others.

“Eh? I thought you said none of them were real?”

“It’s not real. It’s a so-called imitation sword. |4|”

Hearing Yasuo say that, Aoto carefully unwrapped the covering,

and inside was a sword with a black sheath and handguard. Just the appearance and sound made by it was enough to understand that it was heavy.

After Aoto loosened the sword in its sheath the same way as before, a single glance was enough to understand that this sword indeed didn't have a cutting edge.

However, when the sword blade caught the sunlight streaming in through the windows of the classroom, it was clear to see that it had a dignified gleam, quite unlike the Takemitsu sword.

"Do you want to try holding it? Don't touch the blade, as it will make it rust. Also, it's surprisingly heavy, so be careful."

"O-Okay."

The sword, which was an imitation of an uchigatana^[5], was handed over to him in a serious manner.

"Eh? I-Is this for real?"

The sword was heavier than he imagined, so he had to hurry and increase his grip strength.

"Is it that heavy, Kenzaki?"

"No, it's not just at the level of being heavy. Did the warriors of old times really swing things like this around?"

At Hino's question, Yasuo replied with his true feelings.

"The material of the blade is different from that of a real sword, so it's not exactly the same, but I don't think a real sword is significantly lighter than this. Besides, a katana is basically just a lump of metal, you know? It's said that the warriors of the Edo period who carried two swords would tilt to the right when they weren't carrying their swords because they were accustomed to compensating for the additional weight."

"I-I know, that, but..."

The warriors shown on TV would wield their swords like it was an

extension of their body, and even in games and other media, the katana gave an impression of being lighter than western swords. But come to think of it, there's no way that an implement of war that was used to destroy objects and kill people would be made from lightweight materials and easy to swing around.

“Nope, there’s no way I can wield this. Without proper training, it would fly out of my hands in an instant.”

Yasuo felt like he might accidentally hit someone if he tried to take a stance with it, so he immediately handed over the imitation sword to Hino who was standing beside him.

“Woah, it’s really heavy!”

“Is it really that heavy?”

“Woah, this is dangerous. Even if it doesn’t have an edge, it will make a pretty good weapon.”

“Do you think you can do Shirahadori^{|6|} with this?”

“If you don’t do it right, it’ll easily break the bones of your wrists.”

“...Hey, cleaning the blade is really annoying, so keep your hands off the blade, okay?”

As Aoto uneasily looked at Igarashi, Hino and the other surrounding classmates, Yasuo asked him:

“Hey, are you going to use something so heavy in your stage performances as well?”

“No, the underclassmen will be practicing with it.”

Aoto replied in an unexpectedly serious voice.

“The takemitsu swords are really light, right? So people are liable to swing them around like bamboo sticks in the beginning. However, if they know the weight of a real sword, they will be able to represent that in their acting and make it look more life-like. Well, it’s not a real sword, but the weight is what matters. Also, as Hino said earlier, you can kill someone by carelessly hitting or

stabbing with it, so it's important to learn that as well. It'll help increase the concentration of the club members, and increase the quality of the performance as well, stuff like that."

"...So, are you doing a historical play during your next competition?"

"I'm not sure. We haven't decided yet. But if we have the required props, I thought that even if we don't do it this year, then someone else can take over and do it next year, after I graduate."

Aoto wasn't the type of person to show his passion for acting in his regular life, but after spending time with him since their first year, Yasuo knew that he was a passionate person at heart, and Aoto also had the accomplishments to prove that his words were not just for show.

In that way, as a person with responsibility, he was thinking about the state of the club even after his graduation, and was leaving a proof of his existence in the school.

"That sounds kinda nice."

Yasuo unintentionally let his appreciation leak out.

"Sorry, Yasu, I got kinda heated up."

Aoto looked like he suddenly became aware of what he was doing and lowered his eyes in a apologetic manner.

Yasuo also realized what Aoto was apologizing about, and waved his hands in an unconcerned way.

"It's fine, really. Not only did we have no achievements, something like that happened as well. It was not something that could be fixed by hard work."

"...How about-"

"If you're inviting me to join the Theatre Club, no thanks. Even if you put me in front of a bunch of people, I can't act. Besides, our Theatre Club is not so easygoing that an inexperienced third year

can join and hope to achieve something right off the bat, correct?”

“...Well, yeah. But I think your chorus singing is pretty good, so you can join with a skill like that. You can sing songs with lyrics in foreign languages too, right?”

“Thank you for worrying about me, but things will definitely end up badly if the vice-president shows favoritism. Forget about that, look, someone’s touching the blade over there”

“Eh? Ahh! Hey, I told you not to touch the blade! Even though it’s just an imitation sword, the oil from your skin is bad for the metal!”

Due to curiosity, the sword had been passed from one person to the next and was currently near the edge of the classroom before they realized it.

What’s more, a classmate who wasn’t part of the initial circle of onlookers was holding the sword by the blade in their bare hands. Seeing that, Aoto rushed over there in a panic.

Seeing that, Yasuo gave a bitter smile and let out a sigh.

“That matter has already been settled, there’s nothing more we can do.”

Yasuo felt a pessimistic sense of gratitude towards his classmate who had shown concern towards his present condition.

Apart from the unexpected topic of conversation provided by Aoto in the morning, the day went by as normal and it was now evening.

From the grounds, you could hear the shouts of the sports clubs. The magnificent performance of the brass band could be heard from one corner of the school campus. The sound of several hard objects striking each other could be heard from the martial arts room, maybe because the kendo club was practicing.

Amidst this scene, Yasuo alone was walking across the courtyard of the school, and heading towards the gate as the sun started to set. Of course, he wasn’t heading towards the “club room” that he spent

this morning in.

The performance of the brass band suddenly stopped. No doubt, someone must have messed up their part. Yasuo unconsciously turned in the direction from where the sound had stopped coming, and let out a sigh.

“There’s no way an inexperienced third-year can join the Theatre Club at this point.”

Although Yasuo didn’t belong to any club right now, he was also a member of a club at one point. If you just looked at his standing, he was higher than Aoto, and had held the post of club president.

“It’s already... too late to do anything about it.”

However, Takeoka High School’s Choral Club suspended their activities as soon as Kenzaki Yasuo took over as the president, due to lack of members. What’s more, the teacher who had been serving as the club’s advisor left the school that year because their contract period had expired. Due to this, the club was formally shut down.

To begin with, this result could already be expected from fact that Yasuo was the only person from his grade to join the club during his first year. However, at that time, there were still plenty of people from the third and second years, so they didn’t try to proactively search for more new members. Also, the few people who showed up after Yasuo didn’t continue with the club.

In the meantime, the third years who made up most of the numbers retired from the club and graduated. The members who were one grade above him became the new third years, and they finally realized that their club was in danger of being shut down and began to panic. However, Yasuo never had anyone younger than him join the club.

To begin with, the curriculum at Takeoka High School did not put that much emphasis on the arts. Also, the Choral Club didn’t have any great past achievements to show, and very few people who joined this school were interested in pursuing singing as a hobby.

Hence, there was not even a small hope of reviving the Choral Club under Yasuo who was in his third year, and he resigned himself to be a part of the “go home” club.

Yasuo had also lost his drive to revive the club after their advisor had left.

However, every once in awhile he would remember that the club he had joined because he loved to sing choral music no longer existed anywhere in this school, and that would cause him to strongly feel like he had no place where he belonged. He was still not used to this feeling.

Although he knew nothing about karaoke-type pop songs, he was confident in his knowledge of the techniques used to sing choral music.

He had experience singing a capella, and learned all the techniques needed to sing in that style. In fact, he was also somewhat praised by his seniors and the club advisor for his talent.

Although the praise was mostly meant to keep him motivated, the fact remained that this was the only place where he had come close to taking a leading role, hence he still wasn’t able to get rid of this feeling of loss.

On days such as this when he saw his friends living out their youth in a grand fashion, that feeling of loss only increased in intensity.

“Ahh, I need to go to prep school.”

Yasuo was shaken out of his reverie by the vibration of his Slimphone due to a coupon mail notification, he looked at the time shown on the clock, and turned back towards the gate.

His prep school was near Tokorozawa Station, that was nearest to his house.

It would take a bit more than ten minutes by local train to get from Tokorozawa Station to the station nearest to his school.

However, walking from his school to the nearest station would take more than twenty minutes as it was necessary to take the smaller back roads through the large fields and agricultural land to bypass the national highway.

Yasuo thought that he should hurry, but his negative thoughts slowed him down. The fact that it was time to go to prep school meant that the time when he had to return home was getting closer.

Once he got home, Diana would be there. It looked like she wouldn't go back until she had achieved her goals.

His current problem wasn't whether the stuff she said was true or not. If he met with her, he would again be forced to remember what happened yesterday and this morning, and more than anything else:

“...What's with all this talk about Heroes and Sages.”

He had thought that his parents were just an ordinary middle-aged man and woman, but in fact they might possibly be the leading characters of some incredible world. He was afraid of that possibility.

If his father hardened his resolve and accepted Diana's invitation to go somewhere far away, and his mother agreed with that decision, then Yasuo would once again lose a place where he could be in peace.

Even at this moment, the Kenzaki household was being rocked by the storms of Diana's proclamation, but his parents were still paying for his private school, his prep school, and were ready to pay for his college as well. In that case, now was the time to work hard and concentrate on his studies so that he could win a place for himself in society.

He wished they could at least put this talk of Heroes, Demon Kings, and alternate worlds off until his exams were finished.

*

Speaking of prep schools that are meant to prepare students for University exams, schools that follow the traditional method of a large number of students sitting in a classroom to take lessons from a teacher are becoming scarce.

This is because almost every high school student goes on to take university exams these days, and the examination methods are getting more intensive, to differentiate between students with even one point differences.

Yasuo attends a prep school called Tokorozawa School, advertised as a “thousand year academy”. Each classroom is divided into booths, and each booth is equipped with a computer and a headset, similar to an internet cafe. Students can reserve a period of time in the available timeslots and use a booth. Along with having video tutorial courses, the booths also allow students to revise topics and do self-study.

The tutorial courses can be selected based on factors such as the University the student wants to join, or their level of understanding. After viewing the video tutorials for the allotted period of time, the student will have to take a test to measure their progress. Such a method of teaching is becoming more commonplace.

If there is something a student does not understand in the tutorials or their self-study, or they need a clarification, they can ask for guidance from their class leader or a university student who is appointed as the tutor in charge of their education.

Yasuo thought that he could focus on his studies, or rather his life as a third-year high school student, by concentrating on the video tutorial that played on his screen. However, those hopes were mercilessly dashed by the English reading comprehension tutorial that he had selected.

The theme of the lesson was to read a short story, but the story was about the only daughter of a soldier who fought in the Vietnam War, looking for one of her father's old comrade-in-arms. The plot

was so similar to the current situation of the Kenzaki family, that he was unable to focus on reading it. The daughter pleaded to the old man who was the protagonist of the story to rescue her father from some predicament, but the protagonist had circumstances that prevented him from immediately rushing to the aid of his old friend.

After reading this much, Yasuo's mind rejected reading until the end of the story. Even though he knew that this was a part of the course syllabus, he was afraid to see what would happen at the end of the story, when he considered what would happen if the actions of the old man in the story overlapped with the actions of his father.

Unfortunately, today was the day when he had to clear a test to move on to the next course, and of course he wasn't able to properly answer a single question.

"You're usually not like this, is there something that is bothering you?"

Due to that, Kobayashi Yuusuke, who was a third-year student at Waseda University and the tutor in charge of Yasuo, was worried about him.

Of course, there was something he was worried about. However, that was not something that could be resolved with the help of a tutor from his prep school.

Yasuo came out from the prep school looking crestfallen, and started to walk back home with a frown on his face. Eventually, he was able to see the lights of his house. The lights in the living room and the kitchen were lit, but he couldn't tell if Diana was still there or not.

"Does she intend to stay here until Dad agrees to go with her?"

Yasuo had fainted last night and hadn't been ;aware that Diana had stayed over, but the phrase "Unexpectedly living together with a beautiful girl from another world" floated through his mind.

“Something that stupid can’t possibly happen.”

Thinking about it realistically, that was not possible.

Staying over for one or two nights was understandable, but he hadn’t considered the possibility that Diana might continue to live in their house.

Putting aside his personal opinions, it was a simple matter of the size of the Kenzaki family house. Even his mother’s room, where Diana appeared to have slept last night, was full of items that had accumulated over their long stay in that house, and it must have been very difficult to prepare a futon in that cramped room.

Besides, if he considered whether he wanted to live in the same house as her, the answer was a definite no.

Diana was definitely a beauty. However, even if you didn’t consider the stuff about her being from a different world and so forth, she was still someone he didn’t know anything about.

If he told the whole story to his close friends Aoto, Igarashi, and Hino, they would probably say something like this:

“Not only is your nagging father leaving, but you also get to live in the same house as a beautiful girl, what more could you possibly want?”

If Diana was someone from a more realistic place, and she didn’t fill his father’s head with such nonsense, maybe Yasuo would have thought the same thing as well. However, in Yasuo’s opinion, Diana was an intruder who had come to destroy the peace of his family. He had heard that dubious religious cults sometimes used beautiful women to lure in young men, and this situation felt pretty close to that.

“Haa... I’m home.”

However, he didn’t have the option of not going home. He opened the front door of his house with a heavy heart, and that’s when he heard it.

“Hmm?”

Somebody was singing. It was a tremulous voice, but was definitely the voice of a girl singing from her heart.

However, the lyrics of the song that he heard were definitely not Japanese. Which meant that the person who was singing was...

“.....”

When he quietly opened the door to the living room, he saw Diana, who was facing away from him and singing while in a praying posture in front of a gently steaming cup of black tea. By the way, the clothes she was wearing were his mother's, just like in the morning.

Listening more closely, he realized that her voice was not tremulous, she was just singing a melody with a slow rhythm while trying to keep her voice down.

However, it is unexpectedly difficult to sing the higher ranges of a song with a slow rhythm in a low, steady voice without using vibrato, unless you are used to singing it.

Yasuo was taken in by her beautiful singing voice, and he unintentionally let his voice slip out.

“Is that a hymn?”

“Yes... Ah! W-welcome back!”

Diana must have heard his voice, so she suddenly stopped singing and turned around.

Due to that, her knee hit the cup of tea and the contents went flying everywhere.

“Ouch, that's hot!”

“H-Hey, be more careful.”

Seeing the apparently hot tea spilling on Diana's leg, even Yasuo panicked.

“Hey, are you okay? Here, use this!”

Yasuo rushed into the kitchen without even putting his bag down, and threw a dish cloth to Diana after running it under water and lightly squeezing the water out.

“Umm... Did you h-hear, hear that-”

“Did you get burned anywhere? Use that to wipe it off, first!”

“Did you hear that!? Did you!? Umm, I’ve heard that you shouldn’t get devices like this wet, wait, did you really hear me just now!?”

Diana seemed to be very confused, and was moving around in confusion with a red face while holding the TV remote that had been splashed with some tea as if it was a very important object.

“It won’t break so easily. More importantly, your leg! Most of the tea spilled on your leg! Did you get burned...”

“Ah! Umm, I didn’t get burned, but I got Madoka’s clothes dirty, I’m very sorry!”

Diana started to take off her pants while still red-faced and holding onto the remote, so it was Yasuo’s turn to be embarrassed and become confused.

“Hey, stop! Don’t take them off here!!”

“B-But, tea stains are hard to remove so i need to wash it right away!”

“Go to the washroom!”

“But, but I can’t intrude while Madoka is in the middle of her bath!”

“Mom is in the bath!? It’s okay, the bath is separated from the rest of the washroom, so you can go in!”

“Ah, you’re right! Sorry, I showed such a shameful side of me in front of you, Yasuo!”

“Like I said, don’t take your clothes off here! Go to the washroom!”

“Ahh, I was in the middle of my prayer...! And I made such a mess in front of Yasuo...!”

Yasuo felt relieved to see that Diana headed to the washroom after the end of their heated conversation. He realized that he was still holding his bag, and set it down. He then put the cup that Diana had knocked flying in the sink, rinsed the dish cloth, and finished cleaning up the spilt tea. He then heard Diana’s voice that sounded apologetic.

“Ahh, Yasuo, I’m very sorry, but...”

“Hmm?”

She was sticking her hand through the slightly opened door to the living room, and was pointing at the door to his mother’s room that was on the other side of the living room.

“Umm, Madoka gave me some pyjamas to wear at night, but...”

“Ah.”

What did she expect him to do? He nodded as if he understood, but then realized that he was not thinking straight after getting caught up in this kind of ordinary trouble.

“Umm, could you... go get it... for me...”

“Eh? Ahh! I understand, wait a moment. Sorry, I honestly didn’t realize!”



After thinking about it for a second, Yasuo realized that he had been lacking consideration. If she had washed the pants that she had been wearing, then she obviously could not just walk past Yasuo in that state.

Yasuo dashed into his mother's room and grabbed the pyjamas that had been folded carefully to ensure that they didn't crease. As a boy of high school age, he felt regret for a second that Diana had regained her composure, but shook off that feeling and threw the pyjamas at the opposite door while trying not to get them too crumpled.

As soon as he threw them, he realized that he could have just handed them to her without looking, but decided not to dwell on that too much.

"T-thank you very much."

Before long, Diana appeared before Yasuo wearing his mother's pyjamas, and stood there while fidgeting and looking at him with upturned eyes.

"Umm... about that, well..."

"No, that one was my fault. I really didn't have any other intentions, honest."

Yasuo started to apologize to Diana before she could complete her sentence, but it only sounded like he was making excuses, and couldn't stop himself from speaking.

A girl wearing only her underwear had been just on the other side of a wall.

Yasuo's heart was completely shaken by that thought, and as his heart rate skyrocketed, his face also became red.

Diana's face was even redder than Yasuo's, but she strongly shook her head to the sides.

"N-No! I-I'm not talking about that...."

“Eh? Then what is it? Oh, you’re talking about that.”

Yasuo finally remembered what happened before this latest event, and took a deep breath to forcefully calm down, even though he was still shaken. He then spoke in a slightly fast pace:

“Sorry, I heard you. B-But if you’re going to sing in the living room, obviously someone will hear it.”

Although that sentence sounded like an excuse as well, the words seemed to have a strong impact on Diana, as her face turned even redder.

“I-I’m sorry for making a racket... Umm, that was kind of an etiquette that is followed by people in Resteria in recent times, and it’s something I have become accustomed to doing no matter what...”

Was it that shameful for her to be seen while she was singing?

“The song... is etiquette?”

When he just asked the question that occurred to him, Diana panicked even more.

“Umm, I have always been hopeless at singing, and the Church Priest would always scold me saying that I wasn’t putting my heart into the prayers, I actually have no power at all!”

He had no idea what Diana meant by ‘power’ of the song, but Diana’s excuses didn’t stop there.

“That’s why I don’t think you’ll believe me when I say this, but the song I was singing earlier was... right, it was what you call a ‘prayer’ in this world! It’s like the Namu Amida Butsu! |7|”

“Fu.”

It seemed that Diana was still panicking as she was waving her arms about and crossing them in front of her face several times.

Yasuo let out a snort of laughter because of her sudden use of the phrase “Namu Amida Butsu”, but that allowed him to regain his

composure before Diana.

“Namu Amida Butsu is not a prayer, it’s a sutra. Well, I guess the two aren’t really that different.”

“Okyou? Umm, let’s see, ‘okyou’... does that mean a big fish?”

“That’s Ohyou |8|”

Speaking of halibut, Yasuo had seen on TV before that there was a certain large fish that was used in making sushi, and also went well with curry. He was surprised that the knowledge of the fish came back to him so quickly even though he had only seen it once before on TV, and was also surprised that Diana knew about the fish but not about sutras.

“Ah, well, it’s normal for Christians to pray at home at night, and there are hymns that are sung before going to bed. If it’s that sort of thing, I can understand.”

“Eh?”

Diana blinked at Yasuo’s unexpected words.

Even though Yasuo didn’t realize it, this was the first time he said something positive to Diana.

“I still don’t believe that stuff about you coming from a different world, but your singing... well, I think it’s pretty good.”

“Really? That’s the first time anyone has said that to me.”

Diana timidly asked him to confirm, but she was slightly smiling from joy at being praised.

It would have been fine if he had left it like this, but Yasuo suddenly got embarrassed at having praised her honestly, so he added some unnecessary words.

“It felt like you were used to singing that particular song. Since you said it’s become a habit, I guess I can understand that. The melody felt a little dark, though.”

“Ahh, about that, the song is actually a requiem that is sung before going to sleep.”

Diana hurriedly replied to his comment. She seemed desperate to extend the time spent talking to Yasuo even by a second.

“A requiem? Before going to sleep?”

He felt like that could hardly be classified as a cheerful habit.

“Yes. There are several hymns that are meant for singing before going to bed, but I... no, all Magitech soldiers probably sing this song instead.”

Yasuo was about to ask the reason behind doing that, but he stopped himself after hearing the word ‘Magitech soldier’. It was a danger signal that she was about to start talking about that other world stuff again. Even if that was not the case, he felt that he had been talking to her a little too much.

Maybe letting his guard down due to the incident with the tea was a bad idea. Yasuo also felt ashamed at pretentiously commenting about her singing.

“Well then, I’m going to my room.”

After saying that, Yasuo turned away from Diana and started to leave the room, while silently telling himself that he hadn’t put down his guard against her.

“W-Wait!”

At that time, Diana called out to him.

“Thank you very much. That was the first time anyone other than my parents complimented my singing, so... well...”

“...That’s okay.”

Yasuo didn’t really know what he was ‘okay’ with, but when he turned around to look at Diana, she was slightly blushing for an altogether different reason, and he thought that she looked cute in spite of himself, and his tone became brusque.

“Yasuo, do you know a lot about singing?”

“Not really, I just sang a bit, for my club in school.”

Never mind his technique and the number of years he had been singing, he didn’t know much about music and singing in a scholastic sense. He tried to escape by saying those words, but Diana’s sparkling eyes didn’t let him.

“That’s fantastic! I never had any formal training in singing, so I’m a bit jealous.”

“It’s not that big a deal... Umm, I should really go-”

“Ah, sorry, I held you back from leaving. Thank you very much, and good night!”

She ran away looking like a criminal who was afraid of the stares of passers-by.

Yasuo felt that he had just been a little more interested in singing than everyone else in middle-school.

Although his close friend, the vice-president of the Theatre Club, had praised him, he considered that as little more than lip service, meant to encourage him because of his circumstances. More than anything, he felt hesitant to say that he had singing experience compared to Diana who sang everyday as part of her normal routine, and felt ashamed for being presumptuous enough to evaluate her singing in spite of having only a few years of experience.

He had been rejecting Diana all the way while he was returning home from prep school, but that feeling had completely vanished. Yasuo was filled with an immense sense of shame, and escaped into his own room.

He threw himself on his bed, and struck the wall in frustration. In return, Nodoka struck the wall from the other side, which was in her room.

“This sucks.”

Neither Aoto nor Diana had any ill intent when they spoke to him. However, the result was that Yasuo felt as if someone had rubbed salt into the wound that was just beginning to heal.

He knew that he was living a halfhearted high school life. However, no matter what was said, the Choral Club would not be reinstated, and Diana was still present downstairs.

He felt like closing his eyes and escaping into the world of dreams, and wiping away everything that had happened today. He closed his eyes thinking that it was okay even if that wound didn't heal, he just wanted enough time to pass again so that he could forget about it.

Once he graduated from high school, his environment would drastically change.

High school was a place where you only spent three years, after all. Instead of struggling pointlessly and hurting yourself more, it was far better to brace yourself against the dull pain and endure it, and then start anew in a new environment.

However, even with his eyes closed, he was still able to see Diana's face, full of happiness when he praised her singing, and his cheeks grew hot again. As he tried to rid himself of that vision of Diana, he remembered the appearance of his father's Holy Sword.

“Aaarrrrghhhhh! What the hell has been happening during these last two days!?”

The things that he had tried to avoid facing until now all came back at once, and as if to collect that debt, they attacked him from an unexpected direction. Just how long was he supposed to endure this situation?

“Quiet down!”

“...Sorry.”

Nodoka protested through the wall against his impulsive shout,

and Yasuo reflexively apologized.

However, that got Yasuo wondering as to what exactly Nodoka thought about the whole thing. Diana's beauty caused him to unintentionally put his guard down around her, but that wouldn't work on Nodoka. She must have a reason for not getting emotional and living her life as normal, even after listening to that absurd story and finding out about Diana.

Yasuo stood up thinking that the siblings who were being tossed around by their parents' behaviour should work together to overcome this situation. At that moment:

“Umm, Yasuo, do you have a moment?”

Diana's knock and her voice reached his ears through the door, and Yasuo fell back as if stunned by her voice.

“Ah, we can just talk like this. I just wanted to inform you regarding the plans for tomorrow.”

He didn't know how Diana interpreted the sounds coming from his room, but she continued to talk while sounding slightly panicked.

“I have come to see that Hideo is very important to all of you, and it's unreasonable of us to want to take him away from you with such short notice. I'm sure both you and Nodoka can only see me as a nuisance, who has come to destroy your peaceful family life.”

“Uhh, yeah.”

After saying that, Yasuo realized that he had called Diana a nuisance to her face (even though they were separated by a door) but that was realizing after the fact.

Diana didn't seem to mind, and continued talking in the same tone.

“Of course, I ;don't intend on giving up on summoning Hideo back, but I ;don't want to do that even if it means sowing discord in his

family. And hence..."

And then, she said something that Yasuo didn't expect.

"I'll return to Ante Lande tomorrow. Thank you for looking after me these past two days."

"Eh?"

At that moment, both Yasuo and Nodoka opened the doors to their rooms, and looked at Diana in a questioning manner.

"Diana-san, you're going back?"

Diana gave a small nod to Nodoka who looked surprised.

"I plan to leave tomorrow morning, at the same time both of you leave the house."

"I-I see."

Although it wasn't like she had given up entirely, Yasuo and Nodoka didn't expect her to leave so easily, so they looked at each other with a complicated expression on their faces.

"However, there is something you should know. I came here on a mission for the Resteria Kingdom. That's why, regardless of the circumstances, returning empty-handed will mean that I failed in the mission given to me by the king."

"Does that mean you will be punished because you were not able to succeed?"

At Nodoka's words, Diana gave a small laugh and shook her head.

"My evaluation at the workplace might fall a little, but that's trivial compared to the crisis that threatens the world. However, the problem is regarding what comes next."

"Next?"

"Yes. I was given the mission of summoning Hideo because my mother and your parents are old friends. However, I'm still a novice who has only been a Magitech soldier for two years. There are

plenty of people who think that I'm not suitable to escort the Hero of Salvation, and that I was given an important mission because of my parents' influence.”

“Ugh. Looks like there are people like that no matter where you go.”

For some reason, Nodoka was nodding as if she was convinced.

“I plan to report that ‘Hideo has a family who are dear to him, and he is not willing to abandon them to come to Ante Lande.’ However, I might possibly be removed from the mission of summoning Hideo altogether. In that case...”

“Your replacement might not be someone so willing to listen to our circumstances, is that what you’re trying to say?”

Judging from what Diana had said so far, that was the only logical conclusion.

Diana nodded as if to confirm Yasuo’s prediction.

“That’s right. The two of you might still find it hard to believe, but Ante Lande really exists, and the state of affairs there is rapidly deteriorating. At this rate, it wouldn’t be strange if there was a bigger panic than what occurred thirty years ago during the chaos caused by Demon King Kaul. Since it’s a big matter like summoning Hideo, the Hero, I don’t think they’ll send just anyone over. However, I still thought that you should keep this in mind.”

“I still can’t get used to hearing him called ‘Hideo, the Hero’, but can you really go back so easily?”

“Yes. Just returning to Ante Lande is easy for me.”

Although he was still not decided on accepting Diana’s story about where she was from, at this moment, Yasuo had an epiphany regarding the phrase “another world” which he had heard in his early childhood.

“In that case, can’t you do something like this? N-not that I believe

anything about this other world and stuff, but..."

After adding on those unnecessary words, he continued.

"Can Dad go over to that place – was it called Ante Lande? – to work when he has some time to spare, and come back here by bedtime?"

"Eh?"

"Ah, that sounds kinda okay."

Diana was wide-eyed with surprise, and Nodoka clapped loudly.

"Moving between worlds, isn't that something like doing a warp using magic? If you just send him like that wherever he needs to go, wouldn't that be nice? Woah, that means Dad can avoid taking a crowded train to work, Onii-chan, you have some good ideas once in awhile."

Thinking of avoiding the commuting rush using magic that links different worlds, that's a pretty small-minded way of looking at such a grand mechanism.

However, Nodoka's example was still fairly close to what Yasuo was trying to say.

"Ahh, so that's what you meant. I'm sorry, we can't really do that."

However, Diana rejected their idea after thinking about it a little.

"I'm not sure what kind of phenomenon 'warp' is, but it takes a lot of time to move between worlds. The time it took me to come to Japan from Resteria using the Gate Tower which is a magical construct designed for crossing vast distances, would be around two hours in your terms."

"Sure, two hours seems like a lot of time, but I think Dad is probably used to travelling for that long, you know? Even today, he left on a trip to Osaka, that actually takes a little more time."

"No, that's not the only problem."

Diana hurried to stop Yasuo, who was making an optimistic proposal.

“It takes a massive amount of energy for a person to travel between worlds.”

“You mean it requires some powerful magic?”

Diana made a bitter expression at Nodoka’s question.

“It’s okay to think of it that way. At any rate, it is very difficult to maintain the energy levels required to keep the Gate Tower running.”

“Maintain?”

Yasuo and Nodoka blinked at the sudden use of the realistic term.

“Operating the Gate Tower and transporting a mass equivalent to that of an average adult male requires roughly three percent of the annual budget of the Resteria Kingdom.”

“T-Three percent of the annual budget of a Kingdom!?”

“Of course, it’s not like all that money evaporates the instant the Gate Tower is activated, but it takes a lot of preparation to get it running, and it’s not something that I have the authority to use at will... Sorry for saying something that destroys your hopes.”

“So, does that mean you blew six percent of your country’s annual budget to come here and go back, even though you weren’t able to achieve your mission, Diana-san?”

“The Gate Tower works on the principle of ‘making a round trip’, so it takes three percent to come and go back. Besides, there are slight differences in the procedure for making the round trip depending on whether you start on that side or this side, and there will also be differences depending on how much mass you want to transport, so the required funds will change depending on those factors. It’s just that, since we’re using tax money collected from the citizens, we can’t just use it as we wish.”

“I-I see.”

If, as Diana said, it took three percent of their annual budget to travel between worlds, would she really just be forgiven with just a slight lowering of her evaluation at work if she failed in her mission?

Even though Yasuo understood that it didn’t concern him, he couldn’t avoid being worried. It wasn’t like Diana read his mind, but she still laughed and shook her head.

“It’s okay. Since we’re summoning the legendary Hero, we already planned to make multiple round trips. Besides, we’re currently in a state of emergency. Since Hideo has the achievement of leading the world thirty years ago, if required we can also supplement our funds by taking out a high interest loan for war purposes.”

So she’s basically saying that they can use his past achievements as collateral to take a loan from other countries, thereby gathering the required funds. It felt quite strange to hear a person from a fantasy world use phrases like “national budget” and “wartime debt”.

However, that resonated far more strongly with Yasuo than his father’s Holy Sword or his mother’s magic, and lent a sense of reality to Diana’s words.

He had heard that recent MMOs operated their imaginary world in a very close fashion to running a real country, but what Diana wanted was not a Hero’s avatar, but the Hero himself.

“Well, it’s not that I really believe in stuff like other worlds and magic yet...”

“Yes.”

Diana no longer wavered after hearing him tediously repeat that he didn’t believe in it so many times.

“What exactly is going on? You said something about a Demon King called Kaul in Ante Lande, right? What exactly do you mean by

the shadow of the old Demon King?”

“Ah, yes. During the war thirty years ago when Hideo and Madoka created their legend, a large number of people had been killed by the ‘Grotesque Demons’ who differed from humans in the kind of environment they lived in, and everything else.”

That was really easy to understand, but she seemed to be implying that something was different this time.

“However, this time, it’s literally a ‘shadow’. Some of them are minions of the Demon King and the rest of them are something else, but there have been reports of appearances all around the world.....”

It was just after Diana had told them this much.

A thunderous roar rang out from downstairs, and Yasuo and Nodoka cowered down at the same time.

However, Diana moved quickly.

She jumped down the stairs in one leap, landed lightly in the corridor of the lower floor ad confirmed the direction the sound had come from.

There, she saw the front door of the Kenzaki house that had been crushed and sent flying, lying on the floor.

“They’ve... come this far in pursuit? And without even using a Gate Tower!?”

Diana gritted her teeth and glared at the silhouette of the interloper that flickered in that location.

There was a flickering shadow that looked like a flame, standing over there.

It looked like a mass of coal that had been placed in a furnace, and gave the impression of heavy, pitch black flame. It collected itself just outside the doorway, and then:

“Ooo... Hideooooo... Hero.... Hideooooo”

A dark knight, cloaked in darkness and possessing ominous red eyes, stood up from there looking like it was born from darkness and was soaking up the shadows.

Diana looked straight back at it without fearing those burning red eyes, and slowly braced herself.

The young girl, who was clad in Madoka's pyjamas, had green eyes that shone as if they were illuminated by sunshine.

“I will definitely protect Hideo’s family!”

In the next instant, the shadow knight, and the pyjama-clad, green-eyed girl clashed at the doorstep in a flash.

CHAPTER 2

MY MOTHER IS STRONG

It was the beginning of Spring, and the city was illuminated by the light of the sun that was still setting fairly early.

Yasuo sunk his chin into the collar of his coat that he was wearing over his regular clothes, and looked at his prep school. The next instant, he made a face like he had bitten into a bitter bug, and said to Diana who was standing beside him:

“Please, just go back home already.”

However, Diana replied while looking at him with eyes that were shining with determination:

“No! I can’t do that! Not after what happened yesterday. We don’t know what could happen!”

“In that case, what about Mom and Nodoka...”

“You don’t need to worry about them.”

Diana smiled while clenching her fists.

“A novice like me would only get in the way of Madoka if something were to happen. That would just put Nodoka in danger. Since the Rainbow Sage is over there, you can think of your house as being perfectly safe.”

“...I see.”

Yasuo replied in a tired voice and lowered his shoulders.

He understood that he would not be able to convince her, no matter what he said. As if to substantiate that thought, Diana continued to speak.

“It is my duty as a Magitech Soldier of Resteria to protect Hideo’s family during his absence. That’s why it’s only natural that I

accompany you as a guard while you're not near Madoka!"

"But that's... Umm... Fine, I understand."

He had a lot of objections to that statement, but it was probably useless to try and talk Diana out of it since she was so determined, and it was even more improbable that he would be able to send her back home by force.

In that case, the only thing he could do was try his best to keep Diana from acting strangely in front of other people.

There was no reason why terms like 'another world' and 'Ante Lande' had to be kept secret. That's because most people would not believe anything like that even if you told them. If anything, he wanted to keep Diana's presence itself a secret.

Judging by her behaviour within the Kenzaki house, Diana was a well-mannered person. However, her speech and actions would definitely stand out in the current Japanese society. Just judging by her speech, people would mistake Diana for Yasuo's personal servant.

Of course, she had borrowed a set of clothes from his mother, and she was not wearing her armor. However, there was no doubt that she was hiding that mysterious weapon of hers under his mother's coat. Besides, the gray coat that looked like a normal piece of clothing when worn by his mother looked like an advertisement for an expensive brand when worn by Diana.

If Aoto, Igarashi, or Hino caught sight of her, he would no doubt be overwhelmed with questions about who that blonde beauty was and how they were related. Even if he managed to answer them somehow, the word would get out that Yasuo was in a close relationship with a blonde beauty, and he would not be able to deal with all those rumors.

"...Well, I'll be going now."

"Okay! I'll hide somewhere close by, and come running in case of

an emergency, so please relax and focus on your studies!"

"...Sure."

After receiving a hearty cheer from Diana who looked very enthusiastic, Yasuo made to go into the building, but:

"Eh?"

He had just looked away for a second, but Diana had vanished. Did she jump to the roof of a building or something?

That absurd thought ran across Yasuo's mind, and he looked up at the building. He then realized that there was no point in thinking about it, so he shook his head and put it out of his mind.

He wanted to immerse himself in his duty as a student, at least while he was in prep school. Especially since he had taken the day off from school due to the incident last night.

Thinking about the reason for his absence, Yasuo understood that his daily life would be messed up from tomorrow. Moreover, he was no longer able to insist that Diana's words were a lie and reject them outright.

The world of magic, Ante Lande, that had been saved by a Hero.

Something that couldn't be explained by any other means had happened at the doorstep of the Kenzaki house last night.

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Yasuo and Nodoka had both been shocked by the loud noise, and weren't able to react immediately.

Diana alone had jumped downstairs, and shouted something. Yasuo left Nodoka on the second floor and hesitantly headed downstairs, and he saw the front door that had been crushed and blown away by some kind of incredible strength, and the sight of Diana confronting some black shadow creature.

The shadow soon assumed the shape of a human. It was the figure of a man who was wearing full-body armour that looked far more

exaggerated than Diana's.

It's eyes were as red as magma from deep underground, and it gave off a hazy, flickering light and an ominous presence that struck fear into the hearts of people who looked at it.

Yasuo had been completely paralyzed by the fear of seeing something so unnatural, and Diana said:

"Yasuo! Get back! I'll deal with it!!"

Diana's loud voice brought him back to his senses.

"B-But this is..."

"It's okay!"

Diana looked straight at the shadow and shouted that to Yasuo without turning around to look at him.

"Although I cannot be compared to Hideo and Madoka, I'm a full-fledged Magitech Soldier! So there's nothing to...."

Yasuo didn't know why she had hesitated only at that part, but the next moment, Diana ran forward at a speed high enough to crack the floor.

"There's nothing to be worried about!!"

The girl from another country who was wearing his mother's pyjamas swung both her fists at the shadow.

In each hand, she held something that looked like a gun without a barrel. The next instant, both her hands started to glow, and something that looked like blades of light appeared above the grips. The blades of light were the same color as Diana's eyes, and were too long to be called knives, yet too short to be called swords.

Yasuo didn't know much about weapons, so the terms 'short sword' and 'dagger' didn't occur to him.

Diana's slim body belied her prodigious strength, and she attacked the shadow with incredible speed and power, but the shadow easily

blocked the shining blades of light.

“Ku!”

But it looked like Diana had expected her strikes to be blocked. While keeping the shadow’s sword in check with her two blades, she twisted her body in mid-air, jumped upwards, and wrenched the shadow’s neck around using her knees after landing on its shoulders.

“Haaaaaaaaa!!”

Along with Diana’s shout, “something” was shot out of the grips that had produced the light swords that Diana was holding, and the impact sent Diana and the shadow flying outside the house.

The impact of whatever was released from Diana’s two swords pulverized the coat rack near the front door. Yasuo wasn’t worried about that and instead attempted to go after Diana who was barefoot and wearing only pyjamas.

“Ugh.”

However, his legs started to shake, and he wasn’t able to move from that spot.

There was still something that looked like black embers, smouldering near the place where the shadow had been. He could hear sounds of metallic objects striking against each other, but he was rooted to the spot from fear, and he couldn’t see what was happening.

While he was in that state,

“What’s going on!?”

“Eh!?”

Madoka, who had been in the bath, rushed out without even drying herself off and had only a bath towel wrapped around her. She took in the sight of the destroyed doorway, Yasuo cowering in fear, and the flickering flames of the shadow outside the door.

After she understood the whole situation, his mother immediately took action.

“Diana-chan is outside, right? Stay where you are. Also, the TV remote is in the bathroom for some reason, put it back where it belongs later.”

After saying that, his mother rushed outside the front doorway from the corridor leading to the bathroom at a speed faster than Diana’s while scattering drops of water from her bath everywhere, and flew into the air from the road in front of the house.

Yes, she soared into the air and disappeared from his sight.

In Yasuo’s memories, his mother was someone who hated exercise, hated lifting heavy things, and ran out of breath during the 50-meter race for parents during Sports’ Day when he was in elementary school. She was definitely not someone who would use the roof of the house opposite to theirs as a foothold to jump into the sky like a ninja.

He was overcome by fear earlier, but seeing his mother pull off something even more absurd than Diana caused his curiosity to overcome the fear. Yasuo hesitantly stepped outside while avoiding the remaining flames near the doorway.

“Woah!?”

A fireball exploded right above the house, and the hot blast of air knocked him on his behind.

Once again, fear took hold of him and he was unable to stand up.

“Yasuo! Are you okay!?”

“I told you to stay indoors!”

Diana, with her pyjamas slightly burnt, and his mother wearing just a towel, appeared from the dark sky.

“...Did it run away?”

“I’m not sure. But I can’t sense its presence anymore.”

While his mother and Diana were being alert for any further danger, Yasuo thought of something very sinful.

Why couldn't his mother and Diana have had their clothing switched?

It seems humans will think of petty stuff when they're driven to their limits.

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The sound caused by the explosion of the fireball and the accompanying heat wave left a definite impact on the neighborhood.

For example, Kawamura-san's wife from next door was talking about how she had been scared by her glass door being shaken by a sudden impact, in a tone of 70% anxiety and 30% curiosity.

It appeared that no one had seen his mother, Diana, or the mysterious shadow, but several people had reported that they had heard the sound of the explosion, or seen the blast. Since their front door had been essentially reduced to rubble, both Yasuo and Nodoka felt that this was no time to be going to school.

Along with a gas explosion and a fault in the power lines being considered as the probable cause, the police and fire department who had rushed to the scene even stated unjust suspicions that Yasuo or Nodoka had pulled some kind of malicious prank, or their mother who had a driving license had been illegally storing gasoline.

In the end, the incident was resolved after the police confirmed that nothing else was going to happen (which was pretty strange, as they didn't yet know the cause) and Madoka calling her husband and owner of the house, Hideo, to inform him about the incident.

Diana hid herself because Yasuo's mother had told her to hide on the roof of the house, as her presence would complicate things when the police were checking the identities of the house residents.

Later, several news agencies caught scent of the story and collected around their house, so Diana was unable to come back inside for a while.

“Mom! Our house is being shown on the news! A lot of the details have been blurred out, though!”

When Nodoka said this after watching an afternoon variety programme that she didn’t usually watch, their mother could only hold her head in her hands, and Diana, who had avoided being spotted by the police and snuck back indoors after the news reporters had left, similarly held her head in her hands.

However, no matter how much both of them regretted it, it was a fact that some incident had occurred that destroyed the peaceful life in their neighborhood. Even worse, there was the fact that some unidentifiable danger was closing in on the Kenzaki family.

Once things had calmed down a bit in the evening, Yasuo said that he wanted to go to prep school, and Diana had insisted on coming along. In a way, that was perfectly natural.

It was perfectly natural, but...

“Ante Lande, huh....”

Searching for that on his Slimphone only gave him a few hundred hits for the word ‘Antenna’. Yasuo glanced at the building that he suspected Diana was hiding in as he scrolled through the results of the search.

Putting aside whether his father was really a ‘Hero’, the ‘Kenzaki residence front door explosion incident’ that occurred last night could not be explained if he didn’t accept the existence of another world, Magitech Soldiers, etc.

No matter how you look at it, a normal person couldn’t have done the things that Diana and his mother had done. The presence of that mysterious shadow that looked like it was made of black flames could not be explained by the common sense of a Japanese person.

However, admitting that would mean unconditionally believing everything Diana had said, and accepting it as fact. Once he accepted it, Yasuo's everyday life might never go back to normal. In that case, what would happen to the Kenzaki Family?

“...Tch.”

Yasuo suddenly stopped and looked around on the path that he was very familiar with.

It was evening, and the lane running through the residential district was illuminated by streetlights. However, there were a few places the light didn't reach, such as the areas between the houses, and those places were steeped in shadow.

Could the mysterious shadow from last night rise up again from one of those places?

The incident last night occurred so suddenly that he didn't have time to think deeply about just what kind of creature that was, and Diana and his mother didn't say much about it this morning either.

In some way, Yasuo was afraid to ask for more information.

After this morning, he didn't want to accept the fact that things had progressed to the level where his father no longer had any choice but to accept Diana's proposal. Once his father accepted it, his family's peace would never be restored.

All of a sudden, the various movies, novels, manga, and anime he had seen flashed through Yasuo's head. Ordinary people who found out about the secret of the 'Protagonist' would no longer be able to lead an ordinary life.

The protagonist would have a number of foes, and those foes would make all sorts of plans to lower the protagonist's strength.

There would be enemies who would directly challenge him to a battle of strength, enemies who would try to trap him using some convoluted scheme, and some enemies who would use underhanded tricks.

The protagonist had already saved a world in the past. That meant his character level was on a wholly different level, and the forces of evil could not hope to defeat him easily by attacking him head on. To reduce the threat of such a powerful opponent, they could just hurt his dear family or close friends.

“Ah.”

Yasuo’s knees began to shake pathetically, and he felt like he was going to collapse. He had seen several “Villains” in movies who came up with similar schemes. Was that shadow just an indirect method used to shake the protagonist up?

The enemy had already discovered the headquarters of the protagonist, and was waiting for an opportunity to attack his precious family members who were completely unprepared in an attempt to restrain him.

“Di...”

Just when he was about to cling to the name of the messenger from Ante Lande, whom he had been rejecting until now:

“What are you doing, just standing still in a place like this?”

After being called out to suddenly, Yasuo felt like his heart was going to leap out of his mouth, and cowered down.

Looking back, he saw that a short person wearing a plain jumper had come out from the prep school, and was looking at him.

Even before he could process who that person was, she began to speak.

“You’re pretty diligent, coming to prep school even after such a big incident took place.”

“...Eh?”

Yasuo widened his eyes and looked closely at her.

She was probably the same age as him. She had short hair, and large eyes. Her manner of speech was very friendly, but the

problem was that he had never seen her before.



No matter how hard he tried to remember, he couldn't recall anyone who matched this girl's description. In fact, Yasuo barely had any opportunity to talk to females apart from his family and Diana. He considered that she might be in the same class as him at school, and he didn't recognize her because she was not wearing her uniform, but for better or worse, he couldn't think of any girls who would take the initiative to talk to him.

After staring at each other for a while, the girl seemed to understand something and opened her mouth.

"Ah, I'm sorry for talking to you all of a sudden. I guess I surprised you."

"Uhh, yeah."

"You'll get in the way of other people if you keep standing there. Don't you need to go inside for your lessons?"

"Ah."

Yasuo came back to his senses. The place where he had almost been overwhelmed by an inexplicable fear was right in front of the door of the prep school, and he noticed that a few students of the prep school were stepping around him to pass through the door while looking at him with an annoyed expression.

"I-I'm sorry..."

"Oh, it's okay. I'm going home for today anyways."

After saying that, the girl left his side and walked away. At that point, Yasuo finally realized that he hadn't found out who that person was.

"H-Hey!"

"You know,"

Yasuo felt frozen by the words of the girl who turned just her head to look back at him.

“Things are probably looking rough for you right now, but stay strong, okay? See you around.”

“Eh?”

After hearing her talk like she knew what he was going through, Yasuo forgot what he was going to say and went into a daze. In that time, the girl had turned her back to him and left the prep school.

“W-Wait!”

Yasuo turned around and ran out of the prep school that he had just arrived at, and searched along the path for the jumper-wearing girl he had just seen.

“Ah.”

He found the jumper that was almost blending into the light of the dusk, and ran after it.

However, the jumper-wearing girl was walking faster than he expected, and due to being delayed by traffic lights and the crowd of people exiting Tokorozawa station, he found it difficult to catch up to her.

“Hey!”

“Hmm?”

After finally catching up with her in the residential area, the girl responded to his voice and turned around, looking at him warily.

“What’s wrong?”

“Umm, well...”

Yasuo managed to catch his breath and looked up at her, but realized that he hadn’t thought about what to ask her, and was momentarily lost for words.

“H-How?”

“Eh?”

“How did you know about it?”

So he just asked her that directly. What exactly did she know about the events taking place around him? Why did she take the initiative to talk to him?

“Know about what?”

“About me being in a rough spot right now.”

Yasuo asked her what she meant by her words without putting much thought into it, and the girl tilted her head to one side.

“I mean, they talked about it on the news.”

Yasuo made a dumbfounded expression at her unexpected words.

“There was a story about it on the news last evening, so I thought that you must be having a rough time, that’s all.”

“...Huh?”

“There was a gas explosion in front of your house or something, right?”

“Ah.”

At this point, Yasuo finally realized that he had made a massive misunderstanding. He also realized that he had been acting rudely, and came to know just how cornered he felt.

The troubles he had been experiencing these past three days were all caused due to Diana and were related to Ante Lande. That’s why, when an unfamiliar girl tried to offer some words of support, he unconsciously assumed that it was related to Ante Lande.

However, he wasn’t able to react normally because he was feeling mentally cornered, and also:

“You look like a pigeon that’s been shot with a peashooter.”

Another reason was because he had never seen this girl who was laughing after saying that.

It’s true that some pictures were shown on the news about the family affected by the ‘Explosion incident’, but there were no

casualties, and they had not mentioned him by name either. Even so, this unfamiliar girl in front of him had connected him to the news about the explosion.

That's why, he assumed that the girl in front of him was also connected to Ante Lande, or maybe knew something about the shadow from last night.

“...Ha.”

By the time he realized, Yasuo had pathetically fallen down on all fours on the street.

“Hey, are you okay?”

“Ah, sorry, I’m fine, I just wasn’t thinking.”

Yasuo replied with a smile that looked like a grimace, and the girl looked at him with a bitter smile.

“I guess so. It certainly looks that way.”

She offered her hand to help Yasuo stand up.

“Can you stand, Yasu-kun?”

And she called him by a nickname.

That voice and nickname stimulated Yasuo’s memory. He remembered that voice, calling him by that nickname. He also realized that this was from a very precious memory.

“You are...”

Yasuo stretched out his hand, and was about to hold the hand that she had extended towards him, when:

“Ah, too bad.”

The girl immediately retracted her hand, and gave a slightly mischievous laugh.

“You were just trying your best to remember who I am, right?”

“Eh!? N-No, I wasn’t!”

Not only did she accurately say what he had been thinking, but she also retracted her hand just as Yasuo was about to hold it, so he almost lost his balance. While keeping himself from falling over, Yasuo once again took a close look at the girl's face.

Were they from the same high school? Or perhaps, they were classmates in elementary school, middle school, or at some extracurricular lessons? Did they perhaps talk to each other at the special lesson that was conducted when he first joined the prep school?

However, no matter how much he thought about it, he wasn't able to remember this girl in front of him.

"I-I'm sorry."

So, Yasuo chose to honestly apologize.

"Don't apologize in such a dark tone. I'm sorry as well, for trying to test you.... Well, I do realize that my appearance has changed a lot."

After saying that, the girl stepped forwards and took hold of Yasuo's hand with her own.

"I can't believe you came chasing after me, even though you didn't know who I was."

Now that she mentioned it, he realized she was right.

"About that... I'm really sorry."

Yasuo had no choice but to surrender completely. Rather than try to defend himself with some weak excuse, he decided it would be better to give up and find out who she was. Judging by her behaviour, she didn't look particularly angry that Yasuo had forgotten about her.

"I'm not angry, but that doesn't mean I don't feel a little disappointed."

However, the girl spoke as though she could read Yasuo's mind.

And then, contrary to her words, the girl revealed an expression that indicated she was having fun looking at Yasuo, who was trying his best to recall who she was.

“Well, I didn’t expect to meet you again at the prep school either, so I guess it can’t be helped. I’m sure you’re friends with a lot of girls, right, Yasu-kun? It can’t be helped if you don’t remember someone like me.”

The girl said that in a clearly sarcastic tone, and didn’t allow Yasuo to object.

“Eh? No, I’m not really...”

Since she was talking like this, she must have been a classmate from elementary or middle school. He gave up on trying to remember and looked straight at her, and found that she had an unexpectedly gentle and cute expression on her face.

Although she was a completely different type from Diana, it wouldn’t be wrong to call her a beauty. Not only was such a lively and cute girl speaking to him in a friendly manner, she also called him by a nickname, so there was nothing to feel sad about.

Yasuo started to feel conscious of the fact that they were of different genders, but he still couldn’t think of any girls from middle school who called him by a nickname, except for that one...

“Wait...”

A miraculous image began to rise up in Yasuo’s head.

“Yasu-kun.”

However, it was very different from the girl in front of him.

“Yasu-kun, you don’t think it’s strange?”

There were no points in common at all....

“Grown-up... I’m not really sure what that means, so I won’t say something like that anymore.”

“Of course not.”

“Thank you, Yasu-kun.”

Yasuo felt like he had pulled on a slender vine, and a whole bunch of potatoes were attached to it.

“Ta-Ta-Ta-Ta-Ta-Ta-”

Each time he made that sound, it felt like the cobwebs in his memories were gradually being wiped away, and the corners of the girl’s mouth rose bit by bit.

“You’ve got to be kidding me!?”

“Of course not!”

Although she retorted with a wide smile on her face, Yasuo was not trying to make a joke, he was completely serious. That’s why, he asked again:

“No, you’ve got to be lying!?”

“Of course I’m not! Don’t tell me, have you not really remembered who I am!?”

“B-But...!”

Yasuo broke out in a cold sweat for an entirely different reason from earlier, compared the girl in front of him to his memories several times, and finally shouted out her name.

“Tatewaki-san, were you always like this!?”

“You need to add the word ‘Delicacy’ to your dictionary!”

“I mean, you said it yourself before, that your appearance had changed. But isn’t this a little too much!?”

“Oh, really!? Yasu-kun, you used to be a shy boy who would fidget a lot because you weren’t used to talking to girls, and now you suddenly accuse me of being a liar, who do you think you are!?”

“Stop that. You weren’t the kind of person who would talk like this either!”

“Yasu-kun, back then, you would have asked me not to talk like that more politely.”

“Huh!? Seriously!? Huh!?”

It wasn’t strange for Yasuo to act so hysterical. His classmate from the second-year of middle school, Tatewaki Shouko, was definitely not someone who would talk in such a manner.

In a generation when even middle-schoolers naturally carried Slimphones, she was a girl with braided hair and silver-rimmed spectacles, and made you wonder if she was from the Showa Era.

He remembered that her appearance while wearing the sailor-style uniform of their middle school would make people think that she was perfect for a leading part in a drama about the wartime.

Her voice was quiet enough to be compared to the sound of a mosquito, and it was almost impossible to have a conversation with her if the surroundings were a little noisy.

He found it impossible to relate that image of her to this short-haired, big-eyed, sporty-looking girl in front of him.

“I could say the same about you! After I went to the trouble of worrying about you, first you don’t remember who I am, and then you ask if I was always like this! You’re tearing my identity as a woman to shreds!”

“Umm, but that’s because...”

“Ah, and any girl who talks about her identity as a woman doesn’t really have any such thing.”

“What the hell is that supposed to mean!? And seriously, are you really Tatewaki-san?”

“You’re still asking that?”

“Of course. You’re completely different, after all... did something happen to you in high school?”

The phrase ‘High school debut’ flew through his mind. Since they

were in different classes in their final year at middle school, Yasuo didn't know what high school she had enrolled in, but maybe she was inspired to change by a change in her environment.

"You sound like you're asking me if I made friends with the wrong sort of people in high school."

Shouko spoke to him while pouting and pointed a finger at him.

"There's a proverb that says 'Take a good look at a man if you haven't seen him for three days'! People will change over time, you know!"

"But you're a girl."

"That because that proverb is from a long time ago! Stop nitpicking and just accept the idea behind it! Besides, what do you want anyway? Yasu-kun, what did you want to do after chasing down a girl you didn't even consider worthy of remembering?"

"Ah, no, I was..."

He thought an unfamiliar person was related to Ante Lande and chased after her, only to unexpectedly find that she was an old acquaintance.

Basically, he had no business with her to begin with.

"Umm, there was some stuff I was mistaken about, and stuff I remembered wrongly, so... umm..."

"Oh? Do you have amnesia?"

"I'm sorry, okay?"

Yasuo genuinely apologized, and said the words that he should have said to begin with.

"Long time no see. You've changed so much, I was really surprised."

"Yes, it has really been a while. Yasu-kun, I can't really tell whether you've changed or not, but I guess you're not the same as

before.”

Shouko finally gave him a genuine smile, which then changed into a look of concern.

“Didn’t you have to go to prep school? Is that okay?”

“Ah, yeah, it’ll be okay. Anyways, it was nice talking to you.”

Yasuo hated himself for trying to end the conversation with such vague words, but he wasn’t experienced enough to say anything meaningful in such a situation.

“I see. Well, I’m glad you remembered me after all.”

It seemed like Shouko had gotten over her anger.

“I have to go home for today, so let’s save the long chat for tomorrow onwards, okay?”

“Ah, okay.”

That’s right, this was the way it should be.

Although the way in which it had happened was pretty shameful, changes to your daily life should be things like this, such as meeting someone you haven’t seen for a long time. Definitely not things like messengers arriving from another world, or monsters kicking down your front door.

“Yasu-kun, do you have an account on ROPE? If not, can you give me your email address...”

What’s more, it came with the bonus of exchanging contact information.

Just when Yasuo started to be relieved after three days of mysterious changes...

“Get away from Yasuo!”

That voice sounded like the messenger of death, come to take him to hell.

The situation going to get complicated.

No matter what he did, it would get complicated.

It was definitely going to get complicated.

Yasuo confirmed that the everyday life he wanted was going far away.

It would have been okay if it was his mother, his father, or even Nodoka. It would have even been okay if it was a policeman, who had suspected Yasuo of harassing Shouko. Basically, Yasuo would have preferred anyone other than the person who had just appeared.

But, appear she did. The person who was the main reason his life was thrown into chaos, Dianaze Krone.

“Yasuo! I’ll save you right away. Please just wait over there! I won’t forgive anyone who intends to harm Hideo’s family!”

“W-Who are you?”

Shouko looked at Diana and said that while looking genuinely bewildered, but Yasuo felt like even he didn’t know the answer to that question.

“Yasuo! Are you okay?”

He was, until she came along.

While thinking that, Yasuo understood that Diana had judged Shouko to be a suspicious person (even though it was actually the opposite). His brain began to process information at a speed incomparable to when he was taking exams, and he quickly shouted:

“This person is not the enemy! The shadow that just attacked us went over there!”

Yasuo thought that he must have looked like a fool for shouting something like that in a loud voice. However, the next instant:

“The black... shadow!”

Diana ran off towards the direction Yasuo was pointing more

faithfully than a Shiba Inu runs after a toy or a thrown rubber ball.

Diana's behaviour and speed were definitely not normal, so Shouko gazed after Diana who had run off into the darkness.

“...What was that about?”

“Uhh, well...”

“Was she someone you know, Yasu-kun?”

Well, of course. She had shouted his name at the top of her lungs, after all.

“That girl's staying over at my house right now, she's an acquaintance of my Dad's.”

“Huh?”

Shouko once again turned in the direction that Diana had run off in.

“An acquaintance of your Dad's? Not yours?”

“...For better or for worse.”

Judging by Diana's appearance and age, it would have been more believable if Yasuo had said that she was his acquaintance.

Shouko refused to let the matter drop, and ruthlessly continued speaking about her.

“Didn't she say something about protecting you, Yasu-kun? Or am I mistaken?”

Unexpectedly, it seemed Shouko had paid attention to what Diana was saying.

Diana could speak Japanese like a native, and without an accent. Yasuo also knew that she was a soldier. Shouko had been the target of her killing intent for a brief second, and it seemed that she had picked up on that.

Looking at Shouko's face, it was clear that the experience had left a negative effect upon her.

“She’s from a country where things aren’t as peaceful as they are here, so she must have misunderstood something.”

“...It looks like you’re going through a much rougher time than I had imagined.”

“Well, I guess so, yeah.”

“Is she connected to that explosion incident in any way? Yasu-kun, you said something like ‘enemy’ as well.”

“...No, probably not.”

In contrast to the friendly atmosphere from earlier, Shouko’s words now carried a hint of sharpness, and Yasuo’s lie came a beat too late.

He didn’t know how Shouko had perceived his words, but she eventually gave a small sigh, lowered her shoulders, and replied in a hard tone.

“Well, it would be a hassle if that girl comes back and misunderstands something, so I’m leaving now. Goodbye.”

Shouko said that curtly and walked away quickly, without waiting to hear Yasuo’s response.

Yasuo was left holding his Slimphone that he had taken out while being happy about getting to exchange contact information with a girl.

After the few minutes of happiness, the return of his helpless feelings made him angry enough to want to smash his Slimphone against the ground, but:

“It looks like the shadow got away. Yasuo, are you okay... Huh? Where did that other person go?”

Yasuo managed to control his anger because Diana chose that moment to come back, and then:

“Haaaaaaaaah....”

Yasuo let out a sigh that sounded like his anguish, desire, and all other emotions from the past few minutes were being let out in a concentrated form through his breath.

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She was sitting on her knees, on top of the chair.

It's not that rare these days to see people from western countries who can use chopsticks, but there shouldn't be many such people who can comfortably sit on their knees for a long time.

It was debatable whether Diana, who came from a different world, Ante Lande, could be considered a person from a western country, but in any case she looked thoroughly uneasy sitting on her knees.

“Even I can’t find a way to pull you out of that mess.”

After hearing the whole story, Madoka put on an amazed expression and lowered her shoulders.

“You can’t expect someone to believe that Diana-chan, who speaks such fluent Japanese, has just come over from a country that is not peaceful.”

“I couldn’t think of anything else to say in that instant, okay?”

“I’m really... so sorry... I did something horrible to Yasuo’s friend... Auuu”.

It looked like her feet were going numb already.

The chair Diana was sitting on started to make small noises in concert with the trembling of Diana’s body.

While Yasuo may not have thought it through properly, his quick actions kept Diana from injuring Shouko, or doing something worse. However, it looked like Shouko had picked up on Diana’s strangeness, and perhaps she had also picked up on Diana’s hostility.

After Yasuo had grabbed Diana by the collar and ran back home,

he exhaustively explained the details behind his meeting with an old friend, and the result was Diana's self-imposed kneeling.

"I didn't immediately notice that you had left the building earlier than I expected... so, I feared you had been kidnapped by someone, and then I heard loud voices that sounded like they were arguing... so I lost control."

Although it was technically night, it was far too early for people to go to sleep, and there were plenty of people on their way back home. What kind of kidnapper would argue with his captive in the middle of the street at such a time? He wished she could have stayed calm and thought about it for a minute.

By the way, Yasuo was no longer concerned about the fact that he had ended up skipping prep school again.

"I'm just glad it wasn't me..."

Nodoka had come downstairs after hearing the noise caused by Yasuo's return, and after hearing the reason behind it, she openly scowled.

It seemed that Nodoka had not stepped out of the house at all today.

"Well, after the incident yesterday, I can understand why Diana-chan was being so wary. So how about it? Were you able to smooth things over your friend?"

"...Nope. I'm pretty sure I failed."

If nothing else, she must have plenty of doubts regarding Yasuo's clearly strange shout regarding a shadow going somewhere else, and Diana's attitude and behaviour.

He was already feeling sorry for having forgotten about her, and now this.

"Well, we can only pray that the enemy doesn't cause any more trouble."

“I’m really, really very sorry-Auuu.”

“You need to understand how Diana-chan feels, though. Something like that happened right after she had decided to go back home, so her feelings of wanting to protect our family no matter what must have caused her to get ahead of herself. I didn’t expect something like that to happen either.”

Yasuo felt that those words, ‘I didn’t expect something like that to happen’, perfectly summed up the past three days.

“But for you to forget about one of the precious few girls around you, can you really afford to be like that?”

“I didn’t forget about her, I just didn’t recognize her because she had changed so much.”

“No, even that is pretty NG for a girl, you know? Hmm, her name was Tatewaki-san? Tatewaki-san... I feel like I’ve heard that surname before...”

It was a pretty unusual surname, so it wouldn’t be weird if his mother remembered her name as she was once one of his classmates.

However, the incident with Shouko was already something of the past, it could not be fixed no matter how much they discussed it here. Rather than that, there was something far more important that he wanted to clarify.

“Hey.”

“Y-Y-Y-Yes....”

“So what was that strange black thing from yesterday? Was that some kind of monster sent here by that Demon King Kaul that you were talking about?”

“Well... yes..... Eh?”

Diana was attempting to answer while enduring the tingling in her feet, so it looked like she took a while to process Yasuo’s

question, but once she was done processing it, she realized what that meant.

She even forgot about the discomfort and stared dazedly at Yasuo.

“You’re... willing to believe me? The things I said about myself... and Ante Lande...”

“After seeing that thing yesterday, and the state of our front door, and Mom as well... after seeing all these things and more, I have no choice but to believe you. And besides...”

Yasuo lowered his head like he had remembered something unpleasant.

Earlier, Yasuo had shouted about ‘The black shadow’, in order to get Diana away from Shouko. At that moment, Yasuo thought about the appearance of the mysterious humanoid monster that had destroyed their front door yesterday. This was an indication that he had already started to believe Diana without realizing it.

“I thought it’s okay to believe that you’re serious about protecting me and my family from some strange threat.”

“Yasuo... Thank you so much! For believing in me.”

“.....”

Hearing her say that with such a happy look on her face, Yasuo’s feelings of guilt intensified.

“You could just say you believe her now instead of trying to sound cool, what are you getting all embarrassed about?”

He didn’t know how Nodoka had read his action of turning away from Diana, as she said some half-hearted things. For now, Yasuo pretended that he hadn’t heard her and continued to speak.

“Well, please don’t go out of control again in the future like you did today.”

“Of course! T-Thank you very much! Thank you-wah!?”

Diana was moved by emotion and attempted to stand up, forgetting about her numb legs.

“Ouuuuuch!!”

She fell off the chair, and hit her numb feet hard against the ground in the process, letting out a wailing cry

This was supposed to be the Magitech Knight from another world with superhuman strength who had fought off the shadow monster last night? What a joke.

In any case, Yasuo realized that as long as he kept denying the existence of the world known as Ante Lande, he would not be able to deal with the restless atmosphere that was creeping up around his family. He had to face it properly.

Scary monsters aside, he didn't know when Diana or some other Ante Lande-related incident would throw his life into chaos again, so he had to be ready.

“N-Numb... I'm sorry, please wait for a bit... Aaaah!”

“Ok, ok. Mind if I go put my bag away in the meantime?”

“P-Please go ahead.....”

“Yasuo, the washing machine is already full of blankets I'm going to be washing tomorrow morning, so don't put anything else in there, okay?”

“Got it.”

After replying to his mother, Yasuo returned to his own room. Listening to the sounds made by Diana downstairs,

“Kuku.”

He laughed because he found it funny, and then:

“.....Haaaaaaaaaa.”

He let out a sigh after imagining what would happen from tomorrow on.

Diana had showed hostility towards Tatewaki Shouko, and was about to attack her. Even after Yasuo had managed to turn her away, she ran off with superhuman speed.

Saying that Diana was on edge because of the attack by the shadow last night might have been enough for the Kenzaki Family, but Shouko would definitely not be satisfied with that.

Would she still be willing to talk to him when they met at prep school again?

In any case, Yasuo could see nothing but dark clouds in his future with the beautiful girl who had treated him with affection and was about to exchange contact information with him, and his mood took a bigger drop than before.

“Yasuo...”

Yasuo left his bag and the contents of his pockets in his room and came back to the living room, only to find that Diana had recovered from her numb feet and was waiting for him there with a depressed expression on her face.

“I’m so sorry. On top of my earlier actions, I showed you such a pathetic side...”

“No, don’t worry about it.”

“Haah... If my colleagues saw me acting like this, I wonder what they would say...”

“Well, considering that you came here to escort the Hero back, but ended up having to kneel because of your mistakes...”

“Uuu... I have no excuses...”

Diana began to turn red, but...

“Onii-chan, are you really in a position to say that so arrogantly? During the last memorial service, your legs got so numb from sitting on your knees that you fell over once the ceremony was complete.”

“S-Shut up.”

Nodoka's comment wasn't malicious, but it was now Yasuo's turn to turn red.

"Fufufu... In any case, I will do my best to explain what the shadow from yesterday night was, and what exactly is the nature of the evil that is descending upon Ante Lande. If there is anything you don't understand, or any terms you don't recognize, please feel free to ask questions."

Due to Nodoka's comment dissipating the tense atmosphere, Diana relaxed and gave a small smile, and then immediately corrected her posture and put on a serious expression.

"I'd like to hear a detailed explanation as well. At first, I was sceptical when I had heard about the threat of Kaul's return, but then something like that attacked our house. It looks like my husband and I will need to have a more serious discussion."

Madoka also faced Diana with a serious expression on her face. Yasuo sat down in his usual chair, took a deep breath, and prepared himself.

He was the one who would decide if he should believe it or not. However, considering the things he had seen, and the fear he had felt, he could not discredit everything she said.

After looking at Yasuo's expression, Nodoka understood the situation and sat down next to him. She looked slightly worried, but from prior experience, he knew that if he tried to cheer her up or touch her in this kind of situation, she would not only assault him with verbal abuse, but also order him not to come near her for a month, so he ignored her and waited for Diana to start speaking.

"...It begins with the story of the Grand Duchy of Torjesso, which was the first to be conquered by Demon King Kaul."

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The Demon King Kaul, who had once thrown Ante Lande into fear and chaos, was said to have appeared 'from beneath the ground'.

The stronghold of the demons led by Kaul was in the mountains of the coldest region of the Grand Duchy of Torjesso, which lies to the north and most of the land has a cold climate. Once it appeared, the stronghold grew in size at an accelerated rate, like a bamboo shoot.

From that stronghold, demons began to appear one after the other, as though there was a pipe that connected the demon realm below to the surface of Ante Lande. The Grand Duchy of Torjesso was utterly destroyed, the Archduke and his household were slaughtered, and the citizens scattered to different parts of the world.

The various countries of Ante Lande were being routinely defeated by the demons of unknown nature when the saviour appeared. He was Kenzaki Hideo, who was eighteen years old at the time.

The youth, Hideo, wielded one of the five legendary sacred treasures, the Holy Sword of the Wind, Liutberga, and saved Diana's mother, Erijina, who was the Captain of the Mage Unit of the Kingdom's Knights at the time.

“One question. What’s the difference between ‘Knight’ and ‘Magitech Knight’?”**|1|**

“Knight” was once the basic title given to feudal lords who governed a piece of land, but the word is now used to refer to soldiers of the Kingdom. ‘Magitech Knight’ is a concept that came into being after the advent of Hideo, before that the army on the battlefield had many different types of soldiers, such as swordsmen, pikemen, and archers who fought on the frontlines, and magicians who fought from the rear...”

After saying that, Diana took out the mysterious grips that had produced the shining blades of light.

“There was a revolution in the creation of arms and armour due to the widespread use of a weapon based on the one Hideo brought into our world. The use of swords, spears, and the bow are

still taught as part of the basic curriculum, and all soldiers need to be proficient in their use, but soldiers of the Magitech Battalion of the Kingdom's Knights mainly use 'Techno Weapons' based on their compatibility."

Diana stood up, moved a little distance away from the other three people, and produced a blade of light from one of the grips.

The blade of light was about the same length as the distance from Diana's elbow to her fingertips, and looking at it closely, the grip had an elaborately designed emblem carved into it, perhaps it was the emblem of the Resteria Kingdom.

However, what drew his attention was the fact that the grip had a muzzle like that of a gun, and something that looked like a trigger attached to it.

After seeing that, he recalled that Diana had shot out 'something' last night when she was fighting the shadow, and that 'something' had pulverized the coat rack.

"The 'Techno Weapons' used by the Magitech Knights have a mechanism that makes it easy to shoot magic. Before the fight with Demon King Kaul, magic was something that was wielded by a few people who had special talent, and it was used mainly as a large scale, high powered weapon that took a lot of time to prepare. However..."

"It took far too many resources to protect those precious few people with special talent, namely magicians, and keep them from coming to harm."

Their mother continued from where Diana had left off.

"For quite some time during our adventure, I too was unable to fight unless I was protected by a large number of people.... There were even people who died to buy me the time I needed to fire my magic."

The words she spoke were far heavier than expected, and both

Yasuo and Nodoka became dejected.

“I’ve heard that Madoka’s words had a strong influence on the development of Techno Weapons. Umm, regarding those people who passed away...”

“Baskin Grindhelm. He was a veteran spearman from Resteria’s Mage Unit. He had been telling everyone that his third child had just been born. He talked to me about all kinds of things before we went into battle, like how he wanted to earn more recognition and glory through combat. Although it has been thirty years, I can’t forget about the man who died with a smile on his face while protecting me.”

Their mother’s words were full of remorse and nostalgia that she was unable to hide.

“With Madoka’s proposal, and the weapon Hideo brought added to it, the very nature of magical attacks was changed. The Techno Weapons that I use are of a type that is a direct upgrade from the ones created by the engineers of the past, and are among the most commonly used. The one in my right hand is called ‘Castor’, and the one in my left hand is called ‘Pollux’.”

“They look identical, but they have different names?”

“The only difference is that one is meant to be used by the right hand and the other by the left, but they are classified as different weapons nevertheless.”

Diana replied to Nodoka’s question, and put away the blade of light. As Yasuo watched that, he felt it slightly strange to hear about ‘classification of weaponry’ in the context of another world.

“Lifting the cover will produce a blade of magic. The grip has a trigger and a muzzle to shoot magic from, but technically speaking, there is no need to load ammunition, and even the trigger is pretty much just a decoration. However, apart from knowledge, imagination also plays a big part in activating magic, so by having a muzzle to fire the magic, reinforcing the thought that the magic will

be fired in the direction the muzzle is pointing in, and that magic can be activated by pulling the trigger, the process of firing magic can be simplified to a great extent. ‘Magitech’ is a word that signifies the use of specialized tools that trick the mind into simplifying the process of activating magic, but the magic that is fired from here is not capable of wiping out armies with one strike like the magic in olden times. Instead, it can have many effects, such as constraining the movements of an enemy, or directly injuring them to reduce the speed of their movements.”

Basically, it appeared that the paradigm had shifted from using heavy battleships that hit hard to using small, highly mobile forces.

“The strategy of using powerful magic that has a long range and causes widespread destruction has not completely been abandoned, but currently, using a large number of soldiers armed with Techno Weapons that have limited firepower but a high rate of fire to suppress an enemy through sheer numbers is the preferred tactic.”

Moreover, by increasing the rate of fire, and prioritizing stopping power over the ability to kill, it would be possible to plan more efficient attacks.

“Of course, back in those days when the war with Demon King Kaul was still ongoing, people with overwhelming power and talent such as Hideo, Madoka, my mother, and many of their comrades used their swords and magic to defeat the Demon King and his demonic generals...”

Since she had to move on to explaining the current threat, Diana closed the topic of discussing the fighting from thirty years ago.

“As Yasuo and Madoka saw, the enemy is a shadow with substance. There have been many sighting of such creatures all over Ante Lande, and they are causing heavy damage. While inspecting the reports of the damage, it appeared that the attacks were related to Demon King Kaul after all, and this incident is being treated as the second coming of Demon King Kaul. The general term for those

shadows in our language is ‘Shii’, which means ‘Revealer of evil spirits’.”

“Evil spirits? What, is this like some kind of horror story?”

Although Nodoka usually seemed to be calm, she actually hated scary things like horror stories, and she looked a little pale. Nodoka then tried to laugh it off as if she was making a joke, but Diana nodded seriously.

“It’s exactly as it sounds. Without exception, the shadows all the take the shape of ‘creatures that died in the battle between Demon King Kaul and humans’.”

“What!?”

The person who was shocked by Diana’s words was their mother, Madoka.

“At the beginning, we received reports that ghosts of the family of the Archduke of Torjesso had been spotted. They were among the first people to be sacrificed to Demon King Kaul. Not just the Archduke himself, but the members of his household, and the citizens who were killed during Kaul’s initial assault. They appeared from below the ground like the Castle of the Demon King did all those years ago, and began to attack the people in their surroundings.”

“Has that been confirmed?”

“Unfortunately, there can be no doubt. We’ve been receiving similar reports within the Resteria Kingdom as well. The ‘Shii’ have the appearance from when they were alive, except that their bodies are covered by something that looks like a black flame, and they attack all creatures, humans included, with power that is not at all inferior to what they had when they were still alive. Without exception, the victims of their attacks have had their hearts taken.”

“What!? They’re totally zombies! I’ve heard enough!”

Yasuo and their mother took a deep breath, and Nodoka let out a

wail.

“Among the Shii that have appeared, many of them are phantoms of civilians that are not good at fighting. Magitech Knights armed with Techno Weapons can put them down for good by taking some special measures after immobilizing them, but in the meantime the number of casualties continues to grow. However, the real problem is that... the Shii are not all human-types.”

Earlier, Diana had said that they took the shape of all creatures that had been killed in the battle with Demon King Kaul. Which meant...

“Not just humans, Shii with the appearance of animals, and even demons that were under the command of Demon King Kaul have been sighted. The entire world is in a state of panic due to these incidents. Compared to the time when they fought the army of the Demon King, the armies of all the nations have been reorganized and are much stronger than before. However, even though they are Shii, the fact that demons are popping up again means...”

After hearing that, even Yasuo could guess what came next.

“Even Demon King Kaul might be reincarnated as a Shii, right?”

“That possibility cannot be denied. There have not yet been any sightings of powerful demons like the Demonic Generals or the Demon King Kaul himself, but the number of victims continues to rise steadily. There has also been an increase in the sightings of demon-type Shii. That’s why...”

Yasuo and Nodoka looked at each other without intending to. If what Diana said was true, then it was only natural for the people to reach out to the Hero who won the war and brought peace to their lives thirty years ago. Even if he could no longer fight like he did back then, there might be people who wanted to install the old Hero as a leader.

Although Yasuo was a lot more willing to believe Diana’s words compared to the day before yesterday, there were a number of

points that he could not ignore.

Firstly, Hideo and Madoka might not be able to deal with the large changes in technology and strategies that must have taken place in the military since the time when they were active.

Secondly, from Diana's words, it felt like the people of Ante Lande only had a makeshift solution in place and no other concrete plans.

Another point that had Yasuo concerned, was that 'The weapon that was brought by Hideo' served as a blueprint for the construction of Techno Weapons, instead of regular swords and spears.

Looking at Diana's Techno Weapons, which could release a blast of energy through a muzzle by pulling a trigger, the weapon that Hideo must have taken over there must have been a gun. However, his father had only been eighteen years old at the time, so why did he have a gun with him?

And finally, there was the thing that bothered him the most:

"Can I ask you a question?"

"Yes, what is it?"

"Setting aside the Shii, and other mysterious phenomenon that have been occurring,"

Yasuo asked his question, while looking at his mother's face,

"Since the day before yesterday, you have been implying that the Hero, Hideo, appeared one day in Ante Lande during the battle with Demon King Kaul's forces. How exactly were Dad and Mom summoned to Ante Lande? Did someone use that Gate Tower or whatever it's called to summon them?"

From what Diana had told them last night, traveling between from Japan to Ante Lande, or vice versa, would require an immense amount of energy and funds. However, judging by what Diana has said so far, it didn't seem like his father and mother had been

intentionally summoned over by the other side.

Although they were currently important people who had saved the world in the past, and therefore it made sense to send someone to escort them back to the other world, both his father and mother were still teenagers thirty years ago, the same age as he was now.

At the very least, neither of them came from a bloodline or family that was involved with things like magic and different worlds. To say it in more detail, his father's house followed the Soto school of Buddhism, whereas his mother's house was from the Jodo Sect.

Also, Diana's words implied that his father had possessed that Holy Sword of the Wind right from the start.

"Actually... we still don't know why the two of them were summoned to Ante Lande."

““Huh!?””

“Yes, that's right.”

Brother and sister shouted in unison, and their mother nodded with a fed-up expression on her face.

“I don't know about your father, but until I went to Ante Lande, I hadn't so much touched anything related to a fantasy world. Games weren't as realistic back then as they are now, so only hardcore fans played them, and unless you were in the habit of reading books written by foreign authors, you wouldn't be able to read any fantasy stories. Also, my family didn't have any history of training Onmyouji or the like either, so I've never really understood why it happened.”

“The ‘Gate Tower’ used to travel between worlds had been developed at the same time that Demon King Kaul appeared, and existed in Ante Lande before Hideo and Madoka appeared. However, it was initially just a device created to find out exactly where the stronghold of the Demon King had come from. Since it had come from underground, people thought that there might be a

different world populated by demons beneath the ground, and this was a gigantic measurement device built to confirm that theory. Although it eventually helped us find the other world known as ‘Japan’, the Gate Tower only succeeded in finding Japan half a year after Hideo had appeared in Ante Lande. So it’s not possible that someone used the Gate Tower to summon Hideo and Madoka to our world.”

“Both your father and I have no memories of the time just after we appeared in Ante Lande. We also can’t remember what we were doing just before we were summoned there. The most accurate description would be to say that, it felt like we fell asleep, and when we woke up, we were in that world.”

After hearing her mother’s unsure words, Nodoka asked in a tense voice,

“Are things going to be okay? Is it possible that we could wake up to find that you and Dad have vanished again, unrelated to Diana-san coming here to escort you?”

Although Nodoka hadn’t shown that much interest in matters related to Ante Lande since the beginning, she asked this question without even bothering to conceal the worry on her face.

“About that...”

“I can’t say that it will definitely not happen, but in the thirty years since we’ve returned here, nothing like that has happened even once... The Shii didn’t appear just recently, right?”

“The first Shii was sighted more than three years ago. The plan for summoning Hideo was put forward so that we could do something about this threat before things got to the point where we had to resort to drastic measures, like we did thirty years ago. However, things just seem to be getting worse with each passing day, and most of the people agree that we have no more time to waste.”

“By the way, who is the current King of the Resteria Kingdom?”

“His Majesty, Borad IX, is still the King, and he is in good health.”

Perhaps because she knew that name, his mother's eyes widened in surprise.

“How old is he now? Even back then, I got the impression that he had been on the throne for quite some time.”

“There was a short ceremony a few days ago, to celebrate his having reached the long life of 93 years. I've heard that he still thinks about you and Hideo from time to time.”

“I see... He was already a respectable old man back then.... But since he has first-hand knowledge of the battle with Kaul, he gave you the mission of summoning Hideo, correct?”

“H-Hey, Mom.”

Since his mother had started to immerse herself in nostalgia, Yasuo felt a sudden sense of impending danger.

He wondered if the memories from her past would cause her to give her consent for sending Hideo over to the other world.

However, his mother shook her head decisively.

“It's okay. I won't agree to send your father to Ante Lande because of my history. Considering the fact that our house was attacked, there might be someone behind the Shii who knows about us from back then. Neither I nor your father will leave the both of you behind and go off somewhere in a situation like this.”

“...Yes, I see.”

Diana nodded with a slightly downcast expression, but her expression seemed more like she was thinking of something painful, rather than having had her hopes dashed.

“That's right, Mom! Were you able to contact Dad? After hearing about what happened yesterday, shouldn't he be coming back home in a hurry? Or rather, shouldn't Dad have contacted us after watching the news!?”

At that moment, Nodoka realized something important and began to speak. However, her mother made a stern expression and pulled something out of her apron pocket that they had not expected.

It was their father's Slimphone.

"Hey Mom, is that...?"

"Yes it is. He forgot to take it with him. Can you believe that man?"

"Huh? Dad, what the hell are you doing!?"

At this turn of events, both Yasuo and Nodoka were flabbergasted.

"Does he have an official mobile phone with him or something? Or maybe we could contact his office, or the hotel where he's staying?"

"I don't know his official phone number. I usually call him on his personal phone, after all."

Although Yasuo was angry with his father for forgetting his phone at a time like this, no one had expected that the situation would change so suddenly after he took a business trip. Besides, his father was a seasoned businessman who was used to taking trips, the fact that he had forgotten his mobile phone showed just how much he had been affected by this incident.

"I finally called his office because I had no other choice, but they wouldn't tell me where he went, even though I'm his wife. They just said, "We will will inform your husband that you called", and hung up."

It's true that companies have become overprotective of their employees' private information lately, but that kind of response was completely unwarranted considering it was a family member who called.

"I didn't expect that he would forget his mobile phone now of all times, so I didn't ask what hotel he would be staying at, and I'm sure he was drinking late into the night with his colleagues, so he probably didn't see the news. I'll try calling his office again

tomorrow morning, but we should probably consider that he'll come back late tomorrow night, as per his original schedule. That person has always been like this, he can't be reached at important times, or he lets his guard down at the crucial time."

"Eeh!? What the heck, what are we going to do if something like last night happens again?"

Although Nodoka's worry was perfectly reasonable, Yasuo was more worried about something else.

"Rather than us, isn't Dad in bigger danger?"

"Eh?"

"From what we've heard so far, these 'Shii' creatures were killed during the battle with that Demon King Kaul, so wouldn't they be more attracted to 'Hideo, the Hero' instead of us? In that case, it's possible that Dad could be attacked by those shadows as well."

"Since the Shii have appeared in this world, I cannot deny that possibility. There are still many things we don't know about their nature, so..."

Diana seriously nodded in answer to Yasuo's question, and for some reason, she stopped talking for a moment.

"Even several Magitech Knights who have earned great fame in the Resteria Kingdom have fallen victim to the Shii. While it is true that there is no one in Ante Lande who has skills equal to that of the Hero, Hideo, in the worst case, he might be defeated. The sooner we are able to contact Hideo, the better..."

While sympathizing with Diana's fears, Yasuo felt a tremor deep in his heart when he heard that his father was still considered a peerless soldier in the other world.

He believed that his father and mother experienced some incredible adventures in a different world.

He believed that Diana and her home were in dire straits.

In that case, since his father wished to help solve the problem, should he stand aside and let him go?

Diana raised her head and smiled at Yasuo, as though she had sensed his distress.

“I will respect whatever decision Hideo makes... Just as I have family that I want to protect, Hideo also has all of you that he must protect. Please don’t worry, believing my words and agreeing to send Hideo to our world are two separate matters.”

Diana kneeled in front of Yasuo and said that.

“Ah...”

There was not a hint of guile in Diana’s upturned face, and Yasuo found himself unable to look away from her.

“Resteria wishes for Hideo to return. However, both my mother and the King have strictly instructed me to not be forceful. In short, Yasuo and Nodoka, they were telling me to not ignore your opinions under any circumstances, and after coming here, I understand.”

Diana talked while looking at Yasuo and Nodoka in turn.

“I wish we had the opportunity to talk more. Even if that leads to Hideo deciding not to return to Ante Lande, Resteria will definitely protect all of you, and will not do something like taking Hideo away by force. By the name of my father, Alexei, I give you my most solemn vow.”

“Uhh... Ah.”

“Onii-chan, you’re being seriously disgusting.”

Having Diana hold his hand and look him in the eye sincerely, Yasuo, who didn’t have much opportunity for close contact with girls, began to get flustered, and this caused Nodoka to deliver some acidic comments.

“Fufufu. Actually, Madoka, I have a message from my mother to you.”

Maybe because she noticed that it was placing strain on the relationship between the siblings, Diana finally let go off Yasuo's hand.

"From Erize?"

"Yes. Assuming Hideo had children, she made me promise to reveal the message only once I was able to convince them that what I said was true."

"You only had to convince the children? Did she say what you were supposed to do if I hadn't married that person?"

"Yes. My mother insisted that, "There's no way Hideo would marry anyone other than Madoka.""

"Oh, Erize, saying things like that..."

"I'm sorry, Onii-chan. Compared to Mom, you're still better."

"Stop that. They can hear you."

Yasuo and Nodoka had no option but to wait with a stony look on their faces while their mother giggled at Diana's words.

"Ahem. So what's the message from Erize?"

After noticing the cold looks from her son and daughter, Madoka stopped giggling and returned to the topic.

"Yes, it's a video letter. Just like that mechanism called a TV, it will allow you to see my mother's appearance and hear her voice."

"Video letter?"

"It's probably something like taking a video on your Slimphone and burning it onto a disc."

"Eh? Have the two of you not heard of a video letter before? You've never sent or received one?"

While Madoka was flustered over the generation gap with her children, Diana brought out something that looked like a heavy cylindrical can from the room where she had been staying.

Yasuo and Nodoka looked at the can, assuming it had some sort of removable media inside, but for some reason, Madoka looked at the can and made a sharp expression.

“I’ve heard that this is based on new technology that Hideo had brought over as well. Their making is a national secret, and only Resteria’s Techno Weapon engineers are capable of making these.”

“Just a minute, Diana-chan, is that the message from Erize...?”

“Yes. My mother especially had the video recorded onto this to ensure that the video could be played back in Japan. With this, it would not arouse any suspicion, even if I were to lose it.”

Diana opened the can by twisting the lid off, not paying attention to Madoka who looked worried.

Looking inside, Yasuo and Nodoka saw something that looked like a black tape that was rolled around two circular disks.

Nodoka tilted her head after seeing the unfamiliar object, Yasuo furrowed his brow trying to remember where he had seen something like it before, and Madoka put her hand on her forehead and sighed while looking down.

“Just how are we supposed to playback a 8mm tape in this day and age?”

It was a nostalgic-looking 8mm video cassette that had long since disappeared from the homes of ordinary people. Looking at the newly made, yet ancient media storage device that apparently held a video of her old friend, Madoka silently cursed the high rate of development of video playback technology.

Diana had a perfect look of shock upon her face once she was told that regular people didn’t have a device capable of playing 8mm tapes anymore.

After a quick internet search on his Slimphone, Yasuo found that there were several services that transferred the contents of 8mm tapes onto a DVD or a BD, and they would be able to see the video

letter from the other world after a few days.

Although that would mean that the person doing the data transfer would end up seeing the video, since the source was an 8mm tape, they would probably conclude that it was just some weird person wearing strange clothes and talking something unintelligible, so that was not a problem.

“Umm, my mother seemed to want to talk about some important matters from the past that only she, Hideo, and Madoka know about, and, well, she wanted you to see this video whether Hideo decided to come back to our world or not... She made it clear that the contents of the video were vital to your safety, and we didn’t expect that the technology used to record the video would be on the verge of disappearing from this world, so, umm...”

After seeing Diana who was flustered, Nodoka picked up the media storage device that was based on outdated technology and looked over it curiously.

“Can you record sound onto this as well? It’s black and white, and looks clunky, don’t tell me the quality is like watching those old videos from during the war time?”

“Nodoka, you’re going to be taking exams soon, so use your brain a little. Just how old do you think I am? Although they were just coming into the market when I was in school, these tapes record video in full-color, along with sound.”

“Oh? Then can’t we just use the VCR at Grandpa’s house to play it? That one is a tape player, right?”

“VHS and 8mm are fundamentally different. You sound so arrogant when you point out the differences between DVD and Blu-Ray to me, but you don’t even know that?”

“I don’t care about such ancient things. It’s not like it’ll appear in my exams either.”

“Ancient... Nodoka, that expression is going to come back to hit

you in about thirty years. Things like Slimphones and HDD's will be relics of the past by then. Your kids are going to say stuff like, "Eh, a Slimphone? What's that, pottery from the Jomon Period?" okay?"

"Ehh? That's impossible! And Mom, you're poking fun at me too much!"

"Umm, both of you, please don't fight!"

Diana was panicking while seeing the mother and daughter who were arguing over incredibly stupid things, but Yasuo had something he had to confirm because they couldn't watch the 8mm tape right away.

"So what happened to the Shii that attacked our house earlier? Did you destroy it?"

"Eh? Ah, no. Unfortunately, it managed to get away. To tell you the truth, there is a very good chance that all of you might be attacked again."

"So, the target of the Shii is Hideo, the Hero, right? In other words, it's after my Dad."

Diana replied in a tone lacking confidence,

"That seems likely, but we're still not sure exactly how intelligent the Shii are. People have postulated that the behaviour of the Shii is greatly influenced by their actions during the time when they were still alive, so the Shii might..."

After hesitating, Diana continued to speak.

"I don't know if the Shii was after Hideo, or if it waited for Hideo to be away so that it could attack his family. That's why I would like to act as a guard for you and Nodoka as much as possible."

There was very little Yasuo and Nodoka could do against the enemy, as it was a fearsome monster that was out to rip their hearts out of their bodies.

"That said, neither of you can take a long break from school

because of the circumstances of Ante Lande, right? I'd feel bad about forcing a change in your life because of the circumstances on my side as well."

Basically, Diana was saying that Yasuo and Nodoka should keep living as they had been until now, and she would accompany them as an escort.

In fact, if Hideo had agreed to go to the other world, the plan was that Diana and a number of other Magitech Knights would be detailed to protect Hideo's family until the issue was resolved.

"You probably feel that it would be annoying, and I agree that it may cause you trouble. However, I would like the two of you to let me watch over you from as close as possible. It is the responsibility of myself, Resteria, and Ante Lande for getting you involved in this matter."

"Uhh, ok, sure."

Yasuo's heart started to race after Diana spoke those words so close to him that it looked like she was going to cling to him that instant, so he tried to put some distance between them.

He didn't know what she meant by 'from as close as possible', but judging by what had happened at the prep school today, one part of Yasuo suspected that she might demand to sit in the seat next to his at school, and another part of him was happy about getting to spend time in close proximity to a beautiful girl, even though he had been distrustful of her until half a day ago.

"B-but, speaking of guarding..."

"Ah, umm, I won't do anything like what I did today. I will do my best to not interfere in your private lives, and will maintain a discreet distance so that I can rush to your side right away in case you are attacked."

It sounded like she was willing to risk her life to save theirs, but that would allow them to be at peace.

“But there’s just one of you, and two of us....”

“Oh, of course, I will be protecting you as well.”

At some point, his mother had stopped arguing and joined the conversation.

“No matter how strong Diana-chan is compared to the people of this world, she can’t protect both of you at once. Diana-chan will protect one of you, and I’ll do my best to stay close to the other. At least until your father comes home tomorrow night, we should try to maintain that formation as that will allow us to not be worried.”

“I wish we could do something about the door before Dad comes back as well.”

The incident that caused the door to be destroyed, namely the fight between Diana, his mother, and the Shii, was still being treated as an ‘explosion of unknown cause’ by the police, so it appeared that they would be investigating the scene of the incident for some time yet.

Since the possibility of another incident was low, the police weren’t keeping a constant watch on their house. However, since a gas explosion was considered to be one of the possible causes, they had been asked to keep from clearing up the scene of the incident until the gas company could perform an inspection.

“The police are going to be regularly patrolling this area, so we’ll just have to deal with having no door until the matter is resolved. I called the insurance company, but they said they couldn’t make any decision until they inspected the damage. It seems there is a possibility of settling it using fire damage insurance.”

Even the Shii, a fearsome monster from another world, would not imagine that the damage it dealt to the Hero’s house would be dealt with using fire damage insurance.

“In any case, Diana-chan and I will be accompanying you to your schools tomorrow morning. I just hope nothing else happens in the

meantime. We can decide what to do after that once your father gets back.”

“Yes! I will do my best to protect all of you!”

“Somehow, this still feels unreal.”

“Same here. But with things as they are, we have no choice.”

Diana strongly agreed, Nodoka unexpectedly agreed without causing a fuss, and Yasuo took a pose of agreeing while being a little irritated.

Although it was for the sake of being a guard, it would mean that Diana would get to watch his life both in private and in public in great detail.

Although she only came along with him to prep school today, he would not be able to take a long leave from school, so he had to resign himself to being guarded at school as well.

He definitely didn’t intend to enjoy the experience, but once he decided to believe her words about Ante Lande, it would be nerve wracking for a teenage boy like Yasuo to be constantly watched by a high-class beautiful girl like Diana.

Maybe something he usually did as part of his daily life would cause girls to dislike him?

To someone like Diana who was already an independent young lady, and a Magitech Knight to boot, maybe something he did would cause him to appear childish and immature?

While he was talking to his friends, he might let something slip that girls would find inappropriate. In the first place, where did Diana intend to watch over him from while he was at school?

Yasuo spent the night worrying about things like that, but...

“Come on, hurry up.”

The next morning, Yasuo looked at his mother who was calling him while sitting in the driver’s seat of the car, and gave a large

sigh.

“Haaah... Yeah, I should have guessed this would happen.”

“What?”

“Nothing.”

While regretting his foolish worries and the odd feeling of expectation, Yasuo dejectedly sat in the seat beside his mother, who was driving.

Diana hadn't said that she would be guarding Yasuo. Since his mother said that she would be guarding either him or his sister, he should have expected that his mother might end up guarding him. His mother was a legendary magician that Diana looked up to, after all.

“Take care.... *yawn*”

“Take care! See you soon!”

Yasuo could see Nodoka and Diana waving to them from the destroyed doorway, reflected in the side mirror. While he looked at them with a complicated expression on his face,

“Don't tell me, were you actually hoping that Diana-chan would stay close to you while guarding you?”

“Ugh! No, about that...”

Since his mother unerringly hit the bullseye, Yasuo panicked and was not even able to deny it properly.

Maybe because she was satisfied with his reaction, a mischievous smile appeared on his mother's face.

“Diana-chan still doesn't know much about our world. You take the train to school, and have to go to prep school in the evenings, so there's a lot of things about your life that she wouldn't be able to understand. You don't want her to end up doing something like yesterday near your school, right?”

“Well, yeah, but...”

“I’ve just asked her to take care of Nodoka at home and school today. Once your dad gets back, I’ll get her to learn more about this world properly, and we’ll think of a new formation.”

His mother’s logic made sense, but something like that had happened yesterday just going to prep school.

Wouldn’t something similar happen at Nodoka’s middle school as well? Yasuo was worried about that, but his mother seemed to have misunderstood his expression, and furrowed her eyebrows while driving.

“You really wanted Diana-chan to go with you so badly? You were such a cute and innocent baby until recently, and now you’ve turned into a beast who gets all excited because a girl held your hand. I guess I’m getting too old for you.”

“Stop that! Seriously, stop saying stuff like that. I’m eighteen years old, you know.”

“You may be eighteen, but you’re still a child. Give up and settle for Mommy today, okay?”

“Argh! Stop messing around with me!”

Yasuo directed all his resentment towards his mother, while looking at her from the side.

CHAPTER 3

THE WORLD OF CHILDREN

Diana waved at the car that began to move away from the house, and after it was no longer visible, she turned to Nodoka who was standing by her side.

“Nodoka, at what time do you usually leave?”

“Hmm, after about twenty minutes, I guess.”

“Understood. I am ready to leave at any time, so I’ll keep watch near the front door.”

“Okay, but I can’t relax with you standing around out here, so please come and wait in the living room instead. I’ll let you know when I’m ready to leave.”

“Really?”

“Yeah, unlike my brother, I don’t really hate you or anything. Also, I have pretty much believed you from the start, so I won’t do anything like sneaking out without telling you. Come inside, and have a cup of coffee while you’re waiting.”

“Eh?”

“Hmm? What, did I say something weird?”

Nodoka thought she was just saying what was natural, but it looked like Diana was shocked, as her eyes were wide open.

“Umm, does Ya-, no, Onii-sama...”

“Don’t call him that, Diana-san. ‘Onii-sama’? That’s hilarious. So, what were you saying about him?”

“Ah, well, does Yasuo...”

Diana appeared flustered, and asked as if she was preparing herself for the worst.

“Does he hate me?”

“Huh?”

Now it was Nodoka's turn to be shocked.

“Well, he's not exactly fond of you, to say the least.”

“.....”

It looked like Diana was shocked for real this time, and looking at her, Nodoka was worried.

“Eh? I had a slight suspicion about it from the beginning, but don't tell me, are you actually interested in my brother, Diana-san? Seriously? Pfft.”

“.....”

Nodoka actually laughed after being worried, but Diana just kept staring with a blank face, so Nodoka's smile gradually turned into a grimace.

“You know...”

“.....Yes?”

“For now, let's set aside the fact that my brother is not what a typical young man should be like.”

“.....Yes.”

“During these past three days, has my brother shown even the slightest inclination towards liking you?”

At Nodoka's cold question, Diana had only one reply.

“.....No, he hasn't.”

“Well, it's okay as long as you understand that.”

Nodoka nodded, looked at the clock, and climbed the stairs to the second floor.

“Huh, you actually stood here waiting?”

Nodoka came back downstairs after about fifteen minutes after

confirming that she hadn't forgotten anything, only to find Diana still standing in the same spot with a crestfallen expression on her face.

"Was it that big a shock?"

"No, after thinking about it, it's only natural. I'm like... an unwanted pest who is trying to take away Hideo, who is like the supporting pillar for all of you. On top of that... despite my assurances that I would protect you, I failed to notice the approach of the enemy, which led to your house being damaged... And what's more, I also acted very rudely towards Yasuo's friend, so..."

"Crap. This looks like it's too serious for me to handle."

Looking at it that way, Diana's actions since coming to the Kenzaki house weren't exactly praiseworthy.

"No wonder people say that I'm just riding on my parents' coat-tails....Haaaah."

Diana let out a large sigh and sat down on the ground.

"I'm pretty sure that I'm wrong, but for you to be depressed to such an extent... Diana-san."

"Yes."

"Are you perhaps... seriously in love with my brother?"

No matter how much she tried to raise her brother up on a pedestal as his younger sister, Nodoka couldn't see any manly charms in Yasuo at all.

He's not particularly tall or handsome. He's not good at sports, and his personality is vague. He's not fat, but he doesn't have a stunning physique or anything. He's already eighteen years old, but forget about having a girlfriend, he doesn't appear to even talk much with people of the opposite sex.

Besides, Diana had only met him three days ago. In spite of that, this beautiful young lady with stunning proportions and

superpowers was seriously being depressed because a guy like that hated her.

Rather than the thing with the other world and such, Nodoka found this much harder to believe. Just what did Diana see in that brother of hers, a type of guy who seemed like you could easily find around a hundred of them in the same school?

“Umm, rather than love, this might be something closer to pure admiration.”

“Pure admiration?”

Even though she was a student on the verge of taking exams, Nodoka was unable to immediately process the meaning of those words.

“Don’t tell me, it’s not just my father, is my brother a legendary existence in Ante Lande as well? What kind of disgusting and embarrassing legend could that be!?”

“It’s not like that. It’s... haaah. At this rate, I won’t be able to face Hideo when he gets back.”

Diana hugged her knees and continued to be depressed.

“All the Magitech Knights from my generation grew up listening to bedtime stories of Hideo and Madoka’s travels. All the boys wanted to be like the hero who saved the world, and played around with wooden sticks that were a substitute for the holy sword.”

Although Diana talked about the travels of Hideo and Madoka, Nodoka could only think of the time when her parents had gone to the hot springs at Hakone, or the time when they had gone skiing at Niigata, or when they had gone to the zoo at Hokkaido. In any case, Nodoka was sure that Diana was not talking about things like that.

“And all the girls wanted to be like Madoka. They wanted to meet a wonderful hero like Hideo, and go on travels with him.”

“No, they should really reconsider that last bit. When my dad goes

to an inn, his yukata is always completely open in the front when he wakes up, you know? Also, he snores like a freight train.”

“Huh? Yukata? Snoring?”

“Ah, sorry, never mind.”

Nodoka unconsciously passed a comment, but of course, Diana wouldn’t know about that side of her father.

“Of course, Hideo’s travels ended thirty years ago. I had heard from my mother that Hideo and Madoka had returned to the world that they had come from, but elsewhere in our world, people were saying that the two of them had gone to a different world to fight against another Demon King, or that they were still somewhere in Ante Lande, continuing their adventures. That’s just how much the two of them are respected and envied in our world.”

“Huh... I see.”

Apparently, it wouldn’t be an exaggeration to say that her father was almost seen as a god in that world. In that case, now that her father had become a regular old man, was it okay to send him back there? Nodoka began to think about such things in her heart.

“Because of his fame, our world is filled with paintings and sculptures of the Hero, Hideo. Among them, there is a famous painting that everyone knows about, called ‘The Hero, Hideo, gazes upon the sunrise at the Sacred Mountain’. It was painted by a travelling painter whom Hideo met during the course of his travels.”

There was a time when Nodoka was in elementary school, when her whole family had climbed a hill to see the first sunrise of the year, but this was probably something different. While she was thinking about this, Diana said something shocking that made her doubt her hearing, as the daughter of Hideo and the younger sister of Yasuo.

“Hideo looks so gallant and inspiring in that painting... and Yasuo

looks exactly like him.”

“What? No way, that’s creepy!”

“Eh? Why is that? The word ‘creepy’ means something bad, right?”

“Sorry! My bad, I said that without thinking.”



Her relatives often said that Yasuo resembled Hideo when he was young, and she had also seen pictures of her father in an album at her grandmother's house. However, after hearing that Yasuo resembled Hideo who was being seen almost as a god, she felt it was creepy and blurted it out without thinking.

"When I saw Yasuo for the first time, I was really shocked. He looked like a living incarnation of Hideo whom I had seen in my dreams. Any young girl in Resteria would have fantasized about him at some point, and here he was, in front of me. Truly, my heart was fluttering with excitement."

"Ah... I see..."

Even though Nodoka understood the logic behind it, having a girl talk to her regarding 'fantasizing' about her father and brother made Nodoka unsure how to react.

"That's why... I might have been too excited. I thought that Yasuo had inherited Hideo's spirit, and so he would definitely understand our plight. In a way, I was looking down on Yasuo in some corner of my heart. I wasn't looking at Yasuo as himself, but as a replacement for Hideo... the Hero that I had dreamed about."

"Ah, yeah, that's probably not good."

Although Nodoka could understand where Diana was coming from, it was probably not good to think that way.

"Of course, you're right. Even though I said it myself, I feel like cursing myself for being so shallow."

At that moment, Diana suddenly lifted her head.

"N-Nodoka, do you hate me too!? Do you dislike having someone like me for a guard!?"

"Seeing as you can ask me that right to my face in this kind of circumstance, you're pretty tough, Diana-san."

"Ah, I'm sorry!! I didn't mean to..."

“In any case, you’ll continue to guard me if I don’t mind having you around, right? Come on, it’s time. I’d rather not be late, so let’s go.”

“Y-Yes! Umm, but the front door...”

Diana stood up and made to follow Nodoka, but suddenly remembered that the Kenzaki house’s doorway was in a state where the door could not be closed.

“There’s nothing we can do about that. Mom said it’s fine to leave it be. Apparently, policemen will be patrolling near here once every hour during the day.”

“Really? Well, if Madoka said so... umm, we’re leaving now.”

After being urged by Nodoka, Diana said that towards the house even though there was no one there to see them off, and hurried to catch up to the Hero’s daughter who was walking ahead.

“Umm, Nodoka, is your school far away from here?”

“It’s just a fifteen minute walk. My brother has to take the train to school, and it is several stations away, but my middle school is a municipal institution that I can walk to.”

“So it’s pretty close by.”

“Yeah. It’s in the middle of the residential area though, so there aren’t any places where you can pass the time. Diana-san, there aren’t many beauties like you around there so if you just wander around, you’re going to stand out. You should probably just return to the house once you’ve learned the way to my school.”

“I-I can’t do that! I’m not a b-beauty or anything, and besides, my job is to protect you...”

“You know, even if one of those Shii creatures you told us about yesterday comes to attack me, with your speed, you can reach me in time even from the house. There are no tall buildings around here, and if you don’t want to be seen by anyone, you can just fly over

their heads or something.”

Saying so, Nodoka pointed backwards at the sky over their house. Diana looked a little taken aback as she looked at Nodoka, who was a head shorter than she was.

“There are JSDF and American military bases around here, so there’s all sorts of stuff flying through the sky, but as long as you don’t fly too high, you probably won’t be discovered.”

As soon as Nodoka said that, they heard the sound of the engines of a large aeroplane in the distance.

Diana didn’t have any knowledge of the things known as ‘aeroplanes’, but looking up, she could see a large object that was making the noise as it flew through the sky. However, it appeared that everyone was used to the noise, as no one paid any attention to it.

“Nodoka, you said that... you believed me from the start, right?”

“Yeah.”

There wasn’t the slightest bit of hesitation in Nodoka’s answer, which prompted Diana to enquire further.

“Why is that?”

“Even if you ask me the reason... I don’t really know.”

“You don’t know?”

“I mean, you weren’t lying, right, Diana-san?”

“Of course not. I swear that everything I told you is the truth!”

Diana looked like she was going to say something else while being heated up, but Nodoka stopped her.

“Then that’s fine, isn’t it? Of course, at first I was surprised, and didn’t know what to do, you know? Dad said that he was going to quit his job and go off somewhere, after all. It would be weird to not be scared.”

“...Yes, that’s true.”

“But it seems that Mom, Dad, and you can really use magic, and I can tell when my parents are being serious. So I believe that Ante Lande exists. I also understand that you want to take our father there, Diana-san. Of course, I was really scared at first and I didn’t know what to do, but it makes no sense for me to doubt your words when my parents are saying that it’s true, and doubt won’t resolve the issue. Saying that there is nothing which does not exist may sound like the Devil’s Proof, but I saw for myself that what you said is true.”

“I-I see.”

Yasuo’s behaviour towards her was so stiff, that Diana actually felt a little let down.

The only Japanese people that Diana knew were the members of the Kenzaki family. The person whom she had seen yesterday, who appeared to be Yasuo’s friend, could not really be called an acquaintance.

However, after these past three days experiencing life with the Kenzaki family in this country called ‘Japan’, Diana felt that she understood just how much of an absurd existence she was in this world, and just how absurd her request must seem to the people that lived here.

It was because she understood that that Nodoka’s easy acceptance of her made her feel worried.

“Do you want me explain why I feel that way?”

Nodoka foresaw Diana’s question and said that before Diana could ask.

“Yes, if you don’t mind.”

“Well, it’s fine. I don’t have any club practice this morning so I’m not in a hurry. It would be awkward to explain who you are if I happened to meet any of my friends on the way, though, so let’s

walk slowly.”

After saying that, Nodoka reduced her walking speed.

“In the past, Dad had to leave home for a couple of years because of work. Of course, he went to Sapporo in Hokkaido, not some other world or anything like that.”

“Ah, Sapporo. I’ve heard that Madoka is from a place called Sapporo.”

“Yeah. My grandparents’ house is pretty far away from the center of the city, though, and the apartment my dad was living in was right in the middle of the city, but in any case, do you remember? The day when we first met you, my brother was making a fuss about it being an important time because we both had exams coming up soon.”

“Yes, I remember that very well.”

Diana had not at all expected that Yasuo, who was the son of the legendary Hero and a Great Mage, would have been raised without hearing about Ante Lande. Hideo and Madoka immediately recognized her as a messenger from Ante Lande when she showed up, and when they realized that she was Erijina’s daughter, they happily welcomed her with broad smiles.

That’s why she had not expected Yasuo’s fierce denial, and she couldn’t forget it even if she wanted to.

“Well, I’m not sure if I should be saying this, or rather, please don’t tell him that I told you. Anyways, in the two years when my father was away from home, my brother became pretty wayward.”

“Wayward? You mean he was disobedient?”

Judging by his current behaviour, Diana couldn’t tell that he had a past like that at all.

“Yeah. it was just a case of him becoming nervous because of the upcoming exams. When my brother was in the third-year of middle

school, he apparently had grades that placed him somewhere between average and the top of his class, but he also had some subjects in which he could drop below average if he let his guard down. Ah, now that I think about it, he's still the same. In any case, a student taking exams for high school needs to have a good foundation in English, Math, Social Studies, Japanese, and Science, are you with me so far?"

"Yes. They have to pass exams in a number of difficult subjects, correct?"

"Yeah. If I remember correctly, my brother was pretty bad at English and Math. And then, in some kind of mock exam or a regular test, he got a really bad score, and Mom told Dad about it over the phone while they were having a conversation."

"I have had a similar experience. I felt like wasn't going to make it out alive when I had to tell my parents about my grades in Officer Training."

"Yeah, it's not even a matter of grades, Diana-san, you seem pretty careless after all."

"Uuu..."

Nodoka lightheartedly poked fun at Diana while grinning, and Diana turned a little red. The two of them turned right at the crossing near Tokorozawa Station and gradually came closer to Nodoka's school, which was called Kitahira Middle School.

"I'm not really sure, but at that time, Dad said something to my brother over the phone or through a message, something like he wasn't working hard enough, while my brother was already feeling depressed. And that started a big fight between them. My brother said stuff like, "You're living in Hokkaido, what would you know about me?" and "How dare you say that so arrogantly even though you haven't seen me working for yourself," while he was in tears. I was still in elementary school at that time, so I was a little scared, looking at my him while he even vented his spleen at my mother."

“It seems everyone has a past like that.”

“What? Diana-san, you’ve done something like that as well?”

Nodoka looked at Diana who said that seriously, and Diana smiled while having an expression that looked a little uncomfortable, yet nostalgic.

“I think my brother still hasn’t forgotten about that time. He must be worried that Dad might say something similar to me, or that his absence might make me unstable.”

Nodoka said that, and lowered her shoulders.

“Basically, what my brother and I were actually worried about, was the fact that our father who we thought was a normal person was being taken away by someone we didn’t know. The thing about him being a hero, and the thing about another world was surprising, but that was of secondary importance. Once I understood that Dad was planning to go to some place I had never heard about, whether I was going to agree or disagree, I realized that I had to listen to the circumstances while staying calm. Well, that’s how it was for me. My brother wasn’t able to stay calm, though.”

“...Such a wonderful brother and sister.”

“Huh?”

“Ah, it’s nothing. I was just thinking how wonderful the two of you are, since Yasuo is always thinking about you, and you are trying to cheer him up.”

Nodoka looked at Diana who said that with a serious look on her face, and shook her head frantically.

“No, don’t misunderstand. I’m different from my brother. I’m not trying to put up a brave front or anything, but I don’t have a problem with Dad deciding to go somewhere else.”

“Eh!?”

Even though they were finally having a proper conversation, Nodoka suddenly said something like that while looking indifferent, so Diana didn't know how to react.

"I mean, he's pretty annoying. He keeps asking me about my studies, or about the exams, and tries to give me advice which is out of date. That just builds up my stress."

"I-Is that so?"

"Yeah. When my Dad was transferred for work before, my brother was probably thinking things like, "I'm a boy, so I have to protect the house and support Mom!" or something like that. But I don't feel that way. Despite all his talk, my brother didn't really protect the house or help out with the chores that much anyways."

Nodoka delivered some more sharp comments, and so Diana really didn't know what to say.

"Besides, it's not strange for Dad to be away from home a lot because of work, just like he is now. When he's busy with work, there are times when he works from dawn until late into the night, and I don't get see him at all. So whether he's around or not, it doesn't really make a big difference to me. If anything, having one less person around means that I have more leeway while using the bath, so that's actually better."

Even Diana began to furrow her eyebrows after listening to Nodoka talk about the supporting pillar of their family in such a manner. Nodoka ignored that and continued to speak.

"I'm pretty sure everyone feels the same way. When they're around our age, at least."

At the very least, all people of her age group acted that way. Of course, it might differ from family to family, and Nodoka didn't know exactly how the others behaved at home. However, Nodoka had never come across any girl her age who would still say stuff like 'I love my daddy' during a conversation with friends.

“Ah, that’s my school over there. That window on the left on the third floor is my classroom. By the way, my brother also graduated from here.”

Standing beside Diana who was still shocked, Nodoka pointed a finger at her school.

It was the type of school that you could find anywhere, with a cream-coloured school building and a large playground, right in the middle of the residential district.

“Diana-san, this place is close enough for you to protect me even if you’re at home when something happens, right? I’ll give you a call on our landline at home once school is over, so please stay there. Bye, then.”

“Ah, Nodoka!”

Nodoka waved so nonchalantly and began to walk away that Diana unconsciously attempted to grab her hand. However, Nodoka abruptly turned around to look at her and spoke with such a sad expression that it was hard to believe that this was the same girl who had been cheerfully talking until now.

“You know, I’m not as hard-headed as my brother, so I truly believe everything you say, and in these past three days, I’ve honestly felt that you’re earnest and cute, and I’d much rather have you for an older sibling. However...”

Nodoka continued to speak.

“That’s also the reason why I don’t want you to take my father away from us.”

“...Eh?”

Diana was about to take a step forward, but faltered after hearing Nodoka’s sudden declaration.

“If my father goes to Ante Lande and fights against the Shii, then there’s a chance that he might die, right? And then he’d have his

heart ripped out. And in the worst case, he might become one of them. After hearing something like that, do you honestly think I can just say, “Okay, have a nice trip!” or something like that?”

“Ah...”

“If my dad had to leave because of his work, I wouldn’t care even if he was sent to the North pole or the South pole. But it’s a different story if you’re asking him to go to the Resteria Kingdom and fight while putting his life on the line.”

“N-Nodoka, I...”

Diana could not say anything back to Nodoka who presented a logical argument unlike Yasuo, and in a manner that was easy to understand.

“I’m sorry. I’m not blaming you or anything, Diana-san. But you know, if it’s okay with you, please go back to Ante Lande and tell the King and all the important people there that the Hero, Hideo, will never return to that place. If they’re worried about the Shii appearing in Japan, then...”

Nodoka turned around on her heel once more, as though indicating that the conversation was finished.

“Dad and Mom will protect us. So please don’t worry. Well, I’ll be going now. I’ll give you a call once school is over. You know how to answer the phone, right? ”

Diana was not able to go after Nodoka, who slowly disappeared from her sight. She understood that Nodoka spoke that way exactly because she had believed what Diana had said.

In a way different from Yasuo, Nodoka had also rejected Diana’s request, but in a way that she could clearly understand.

More than anything else, she was also a ‘daughter’, so Diana didn’t have the means to counter Nodoka’s words.

“A chance that her father could die...”

Even after Nodoka had gone into the school and disappeared from her sight, Diana continued to stand there while looking dazed. Once more students started to arrive, as though she was fighting against that wave of people, Diana slowly started to walk back to the Kenzaki house.

“Saying that everyone should have the same kind of resolve... would be selfish, right?”

Japan was different from Resteria.

There was a definite difference between herself, who had first-hand experience, and Yasuo and Nodoka, who had just found out about this a few days ago.

Is it okay for a person who has experienced the horrors of a battlefield, to blame a civilian who glorifies peace in spite of never having fought?

Even if those peace-loving people were dragged into the conflict, what would happen to the country once the fighting ended? There would be no immediate peace. Instead, the number of people who experience misfortune would simply increase.

Besides, she was a Magitech Knight, and she was sworn to protect the innocent.

In that case, should she be ashamed of Ante Lande for being so weak as to continue clinging to a Hero who had retired thirty years ago, instead of trying to do something with the strength that they had on hand?

“...But...”

Diana listened equally to both the voices that were arguing in her heart. It was also a fact that lives could not be saved by relying on pride alone.

Even now, there were people in Resteria, and the other kingdoms of Ante Lande, who were losing their lives because of the rampage of the Shii. If the Hero, Hideo, was to appear before the people once

again, he would definitely be a big help to the people, both physically and mentally.

Unlike his adventure thirty years ago, when he fought against the enemy with almost no support, this time, the entire world was prepared to assemble under Hideo, the Hero, and fight in an organized manner. Compared to the time when he fought against the Demon King Kaul, he would be far safer now. Erijina, the King of Resteria, and the other Kingdoms did not think that Hideo was immortal. They understood that he must have aged significantly, and were making plans to ask for his help while accounting for that.

So, Hideo's life was definitely...

"...Not in any danger, or so I'd like to say."

He would probably be safe.

But there are no certainties on a battlefield. Even Diana, who had only spent two years as a Magitech Knight, learned that simple truth.

She was forced to learn it.

She saw it for herself.

She acknowledged it.

"It's probably impossible."

Words of defeat came tumbling out of Diana's mouth. Nodoka's resolve was harder than she had expected. No matter how much Yasuo and Nodoka came to like her, she understood in these past three days that becoming friendly with them and having them give their consent to send Hideo to the other world were entirely different matters.

Even Hideo would not come to Ante Lande if that meant breaking his ties with his family, and Diana was not firm enough in her conviction to forcefully take Hideo back using any means necessary.

While dragging her feet, Diana had already walked far enough

that she couldn't see Nodoka's school anymore, and finally raised her head.

"...Ah? Which way was I supposed to go to get back home?"

Diana finally realized that she was standing in unfamiliar surroundings.

※

"Mom, what are you planning to do?"

"About what?"

Yasuo asked his mother while she was waiting at a red light.

"I mean, the stuff about Diana, Ante Lande, and Dad."

While waiting for the traffic light to become green, his mother had a habit of moving the index finger of each hand up and down while gripping the steering wheel with both hands.

"You're right. Whatever should we do?"

But, the answer he received once the light had turned green sounded like his mother didn't even care.

"Whatever should we do?" Come on, you've got to do better than that."

"What about you? Were you convinced after hearing her talk yesterday?"

"...No. Well, I won't deny that a world called Ante Lande exists anymore."

When his mother turned the conversation to him, Yasuo turned to look out of the window.

"But believing that and agreeing to send Dad to the other world are different things, right?"

"So you don't want him to go."

"Of course I don't. I mean, he'll have to quit his job to do that,

right? Even if everything goes well and he manages to defeat those Shii or whatever they're called, can Dad really find another job at his age?"

"Do you just want your dad to keep working like he is now?"

"What do you mean?"

"I didn't know that you were so attached to your father's job."

"Well, I don't know if I'd call it an 'attachment', but..."

"In that case, would you say the same thing if your father decided to quit his job and open a soba restaurant?"

"Eh? A soba restaurant?"

Since he was asked something completely unexpected, Yasuo took a moment to imagine that, and then replied.

"I'd be surprised, and would worry if he could make any money that way... but I'd probably let him do it if he really wanted to."

"Right. I'd definitely object, though."

"Huh?"

"Back when he was young, one of his managers took him to some kind of cooking class, and he brought back some of the soba that he had made. It tasted incredibly bad, and even the shape of the noodles was irregular. Besides, that person doesn't even have the social skills required to open a restaurant. Since he was a hero in the past, and is in an important position in his company now, he's probably not humble enough to deal with unruly customers in a proper manner."

"We're not talking about that sort of thing, though."

Yasuo thought that his mother was just messing with him, but her face looked more serious than he expected.

"That's exactly what we're talking about. You can imagine what a person working in a company does, and what a person does if

they're running a soba restaurant. But if you're against sending your father to Ante Lande just because you don't understand what it means to be a Hero, or a Magitech Knight, then you'll have a hard time convincing your father not to go.”

“It's not... I don't think...”

He couldn't confidently declare that his mother's words were not true.

That's because Yasuo actually didn't have any idea what kind of work his father did now. It was on the level where he only found out what his father's company did after being asked by the girls in his class.

He understood that his father was “working hard”, and “earning money”, and “supporting his family with that money”. However, he had never given thought to “what kind of work his father did”, or “how he earned his salary”, or “how much money he earned” in order to support his family.

“By the way, Nodoka is definitely against it.”

“Eh?”

“Why are you acting so surprised?”

“I mean, Nodoka was okay with having Diana around, and believed her words before I did...”

“Did you hear that from her?”

“No, but that's what it looked like.”

“You're really going to have trouble with women at this rate.”

“Where did that come from!?”

“Well, from my perspective, both you and Nodoka are against him going to the other world, so I can either take the side of Ante Lande, or take the side of you both. If I pick one of the options, the other might break beyond repair. Saving one of them, means choosing to not save the other. If both I and the woman you love were about to

fall off a cliff, which one of us would you save? If you were really faced with such a decision in real life, you wouldn't be able to arrive at an answer so easily.”

“T-That is...”

“That’s why I’m saying that you should give it some more thought. You should properly think about the reason why you don’t want him to go. This is especially important if you believe what Diana-chan has to say.”

After hearing his mother talk so seriously, Yasuo had nothing to say in return.

The interior of the car was completely silent after that, and eventually, the front gates of Yasuo’s school came into sight.

“Well then, I’ll park the car somewhere close by and have tea in one of the shops around here. You have prep school today as well, right? Give me a call once school is over. Bye, then. Go and concentrate on your studies.”

Saying that, his mother dropped him off at the gates, and drove away.

“What am I supposed to do?”

He believed that what Diana said was true, but it was probably not wrong to think of that as being different from agreeing to let his father go.

Thinking about it normally, it would be best to reject Diana and Ante Lande’s request, and continue to live their life peacefully as they had been doing until now.

However, why did he feel that that was the best option?

“Thank you so much, for believing me!”

After remembering Diana’s expression that was a mixture of relaxation, relief, and joy, Yasuo shook his head. Her expression at that time told her just how tense she had been until then, and he

couldn't deny that he felt some sympathy for her.

If he had a friend who had fought beside him while putting their life on the line, and if that friend's child came to him looking for help... If he was in his father's position, he would definitely want to help if there was something he could do.

"I guess I can't really arrive at a proper answer."

Yasuo was in this state after having spent just a few days with Diana. His parents, who had a far deeper connection to Ante Lande, must be much more confused than he was.

"Just what should we do from now on?"

Yasuo's father would be back soon, but how would Hideo react after knowing that Yasuo and Nodoka had accepted Diana's existence, and believed her words?

"Haaah...."

Even if the five of them assembled in the living room and talked again about whether his father should go to Ante Lande, Yasuo had absolutely no confidence that he would be able to offer any constructive comments, so he just felt more depressed.

"Oh, Yasu? Did you just get out of a car?"

At that moment, Aoto walked up from behind him, and Yasuo turned around while still being in low spirits.

"Ah, good morning, Aoto."

"How lucky, you get to come to school by car. Were you absent the other day because you hurt your leg or something?"

"No, it's nothing like that. My mom had some work around here so she gave me a ride."

"You really are lucky. At my place, only my dad has a driving license, and even in a situation like this, he would tell me not to waste the money I put into my train pass, and refuse to give me a ride."

While he was speaking, Aoto was dragging a large suitcase behind him, looking as though he was about to head off on a journey to a foreign country.

“You’re carrying some pretty heavy looking stuff today as well, I see. More props?”

“Well, there’s that too. I’m also carrying makeup equipment for the new members of the club. They’re surprising heavy if you carry a number of them at the same time.”

“Makeup equipment? Oh, you actually go to all that effort just for a high school-level play?”

“Of course we do. We can’t put on a performance otherwise.”

“Really?”

“If you stand under a bright spotlight without any makeup, only your eyebrows would pop out. It would make it impossible to show any facial expression.”

He probably meant that the harsh light would make it harder to see the face, but Yasuo imagined the eyebrows popping right off the face and found it funny.

“The Cine Club uses a camera, so they do a lot more. Even if they enact the same scene, depending on the time when they do the filming, the amount of sunlight will differ and mess with the recording, so they have to measure the intensity of light before each cut and adjust the makeup of the actors accordingly.”

“Seriously? They do stuff like that?”

“Even for acting on stage, we redo the makeup of the actors between each of their parts.”

Yasuo had often seen the performance of the Theatre Club and the Cine Club during the cultural festivals, but he never imagined that so much effort was going into each production behind the scenes. However, it was easy enough to imagine if one just put a little

thought into it, and so Yasuo felt depressed after being shown yet again just how shallow his thinking was.

“Hey, mind if I ask you something weird? Aoto, what kind of work does your father do?”

“What’s with the sudden enquiry into my father’s occupation? He’s nothing special, just an ordinary salaryman...”

“...I wonder what it means to be an ordinary salaryman.”

“Eh? Like I said, he just puts on a suit in the morning and goes to his office, just like other salarymen do.”

“I wonder what salarymen do once they reach their office.”

“They work, right?”

“I mean, what kind of work do they do? What does a salaryman do once he reaches his workplace?”

“Ah, they probably...”

Aoto, who had been casually answering Yasuo’s questions until now, stopped speaking, and:

“I wonder what he does. Stuff like management and accounting...? Back when I was in elementary school, we were given an assignment to find out what our parents did for a living, and I remember talking to my dad about stuff like the price of iron, and something about the stock of other materials, so he’s probably walking around, selling iron and steel to manufacturing corporations.”

“This isn’t a game, there’s no way he’s walking around while carrying a lump of metal that he can sell in a shop.”

“Well, yeah... but I really have no idea what he does. Maybe I’ll ask him when I get back home today. Actually, I won’t. I’ll probably get a lecture if I do.”

Yasuo smiled bitterly at Aoto who took back his words after barely a second, but he realized that he was feeling reassured somewhere

in his heart.

Even Aoto, who had a much more stable school life, and was enjoying his student life a lot more than Yasuo, had not given much thought to what his father did for a living. Yasuo felt like he was able to confirm that this was normal for a high school student.

“Ah, but you know, considering my father’s annual income, I sometimes feel worried if I can earn the same amount as my dad when I’m his age. You know, the tuition fee for a private school is higher than a public school, right?. It probably costs something like a million yen per year. It’s pretty incredible that he’s able to pay that much money every year.”

“A million yen, huh...”

After hearing that phrase that he had only heard in television programmes so far, the amount of money didn’t seem real to Yasuo, just like Ante Lande felt unreal to him. However, considering how he wasn’t able to imagine the scope of that much money at once, he had to agree that Aoto was right.

“...It’s probably impossible, if I keep on being an actor.”

“Eh?”

However, Yasuo was surprised at the next words that Aoto said.

“Aoto, you’re planning to keep doing plays in the future? You want to become an actor?”

Yasuo was surprised because he had assumed that Aoto wasn’t the type of person to do that, but Aoto returned an unexpectedly serious expression.

“It’s not that simple. Yasuo, did you join the Choral Club in your first year because you wanted to become a professional singer? You didn’t, right? Not everyone who enters a college focused on the Arts goes on to become a professional in that field, and not everyone who takes science in college becomes a scientist or a researcher.”

“W-Well, yeah...”

“Life would be fun if you could earn money while doing something you like. Thinking that way is a waste of time, though. If that was possible, wouldn’t everyone do that? Of course, if I could keep acting, I would like to do that, and if that lets me earn a decent amount of money, I’d be very happy. Things probably won’t go so smoothly, but it’s human nature to feel that it would be nice to keep doing the things you like. It’s something like that.”

“Something like that, huh...”

Right now, Yasuo didn’t have anything he was passionate about, so he didn’t really understand what Aoto meant by saying that it was something like that. However, there was something that he understood.

Were his parents really living their lives by doing stuff that they liked?

“Your father works at Yamahata, right, Yasu? Does he actually work with the making of recipe books and stuff?”

“...I’m not really sure. He’s off on a business trip to Osaka right now, but he usually doesn’t talk about his work at home.”

When Yasuo was in elementary school, he had the same assignment of “researching about the job of a relative.” At that time, since his father’s older brother, that is, his uncle, had the more interesting job of being a policeman, he didn’t understand much about his father’s job until recently.

“You know, my dad has recently started saying stuff like it is the responsibility of the child to become more successful than their parents. Even if I wash my hands of acting and put all my efforts into getting a regular job, I don’t think I’ll be able to win, considering the times we live in.”

“...Well, yeah.”

In Yasuo’s current situation, the criteria for deciding the winner

and loser were completely different, but there was no point in talking about that.

“Besides, I can’t really imagine what it would be like to be married, and have kids.”

“Ah, I understand. More like, I can’t even imagine getting a girlfriend.”

“Aoto, you’re better off than me. The Theatre Club has a lot of girls right?”

“You know, there’s no relation between knowing a lot of girls and getting a girlfriend. If you’re going to say that, half of our classmates are girls, so why don’t either of us have a girlfriend?”

“Ugh, you’re right.”

“And what about prep school? Yasu, you go to that Senshuu Academy, right? That place doesn’t hold regular classroom sessions, right? My place is completely self-study as well, so I can’t even talk to any of the girls there unless I happen to meet someone from the same school.”

This must be what it meant to be struck dumbfounded.

Yasuo was just letting Aoto do all the talking, but thanks to that, he remembered something important. Even before considering stuff like marriage and kids, wasn’t there an important event that he had to complete, right before his eyes?

After completely embarrassing himself in front of Tatewaki Shouko, and then causing trouble for her, would she be willing to treat the incident involving him and Diana as an issue of no importance when they met at prep school again?

The Head Teacher and teacher in charge of each student at the prep school would counsel a student not only on matters related to academics, but also offered advice regarding life issues.

To him, the incident with Tatewaki Shouko didn’t really feel like

an issue compared to the problems his family was facing related to Ante Lande, but now that he was considering how he should deal with it, he realized that it was actually a pretty big deal.

A student was threatened by an unknown foreigner on the street, at night.

The only relief was that Yasuo was not directly responsible, but it was still a fact that this incident could mess up his peaceful life and act as an obstacle in the future.

“I wanted to at least have a peaceful life during the time when I was at prep school...”

Thinking about prep school that he had to attend this evening, Yasuo’s already burdened heart felt even heavier.

“She’s... not here.”

“What’s wrong?”

“Nothing, I just thought she might be lying in wait for me here. The girl I told you about yesterday.”

Yasuo was surveying the surroundings of his prep school from a nearby parking lot, but he couldn’t see Tatewaki Shouko anywhere as of now.

“Really, do you think anyone would go out of their way to talk to a cold-hearted ex-classmate who didn’t even remember their name, the day after that person’s friend attempted to attack them in the street?”

This must be what it meant to rub salt onto a wound.

“Well, the only thing you can do is to apologise profusely the next time you see her, and request her not to make an issue out of it at the prep school. I do feel sorry that this incident was caused due to the troubles belonging to me and your father, though.”

After saying that, his mother continued to speak.

“If it has already become a problem at the prep school, give me a

call. I'll take the responsibility.”

“Mom, I thought you came with me to protect me from the Shii?”

“As a mother, I think it’s more appropriate for me to protect you from a scandal, instead of otherworld monsters.”

That was certainly true, but she still had the nerve to say something like that after all that had happened?

“Neither I nor your father want your future, or Nodoka’s, to be affected due to the stuff we did all those years ago. I will protect your good name, even if I have to summon Diana-chan’s guardians, Erize and Alex, to apologize to the teachers at the prep school and that person called Tatewaki-san.”

Could there ever be a more prosaic summoning than that?

Yasuo couldn’t imagine a magician and knight who had helped to save a world, bowing their heads and apologizing to the teachers and parents.

“They’re trying to rely on your father after all this time, so asking them to do at least that much should be okay.”

“I’m not sure it works that way.”

“To a certain extent, parents are responsible for the blunders of their children, after all.”

“...Just to make things clear, I just couldn’t recall who Tatewaki-san was at that time. I didn’t do anything else, okay?”

Yasuo wasn’t sure if his mother was saying that to lighten his burden or make him anxious, so he shot a sharp glance at her, but she didn’t seem to mind.

“You should understand by now that the people who fought beside the undefeatable hero and saved a world in the past are now prepared to protect you with all their might, so hurry up and go.”

After saying that, his mother got back in the driver’s seat of the car, and spoke to him with a serious expression.

“I don’t have any right to tell you this, but still...”

His mother spoke while looking in the direction of the prep school.

“I want to keep the number of casualties as low as possible. The fewer the people who know about your father and Ante Lande, the better. I already told Diana-chan about this last night, so I’m counting on you as well. Do your best to explain away Dina-chan’s presence and the ‘Gas Explosion’ incident, and if anything strange happens, run away at once and give me a call, okay?”

After remaining silent for a while, Yasuo gave a small nod.

“I’m not going to tell anyone about all of this, and no one would believe me if I did. Besides, I’m scared of that shadow as well, if it appears again, I’ll be sure to run away immediately.”

“...You’re right. I’m sorry.”

After being sent off by his mother who had a slightly sad expression on her face, Yasuo headed straight for the prep school. He hesitantly entered, but the teacher in charge of him didn’t appear to confront him, and he also didn’t see Tatewaki Shouko in the lounge space.

After finishing one of the lessons, he again came to take a look in the lounge space, but he still didn’t see her anywhere.

“Maybe she didn’t come to school today? Well, maybe she just didn’t have any lessons today.”

While musing about that, he looked outside the school, and saw the car with his mother waiting in the darkness.

After being somewhat reassured by that sight, Yasuo berated himself.

“Feeling safe after seeing my mother, what am I, a kid?”

Apparently, Yasuo was the type of child who could not go alone to the toilet at night until the second year of elementary school. Although he didn’t remember such an embarrassing experience, he

did remember that he was afraid of darkness.

Just what had he been afraid of in those days? He got the impression that it was not something concrete like the demons and evil spirits that appeared in horror stories.

The fear of the unknown.

You could see things during the day, but it was different at night.

When he was little, he rarely felt the sensation of “night” when he was at home. The Kenzaki family did not have any strict rules, but he would hardly ever stay awake beyond 10:00 PM.

When was it that he stopped feeling an unexplainable fear of the darkness?

When was it that he began to fear that something was lurking in the shadows?

“You’re spacing off again in such a place.”

That girl spoke as if she was waiting for this moment, and Yasuo heard a familiar voice, but he still couldn’t link that to her appearance.

He was a little startled, but indeed, the voice belonged to the girl called Tatewaki Shouko.

“Y-you’re here.”

“Yes, I am. What, were you trying to hide from me?”

She said that in a slightly teasing manner, but then smiled and pointed in a particular direction.

“I was talking to Kobayashi-sensei until now. I wanted to change my curriculum.”

“Is that related to your plans for your future studies?”

What Shouko was pointing to was a booth used for interviews. There are cases when a student, for whatever reason, is unable to progress satisfactorily in their lessons. In such cases, forcing them

to continue with the curriculum is a waste of time. In order to prevent that, the student counselling room was often used to talk to the student alone, or along with their parents, about their plans for the future.

Although it was called “private”, the interview was not carried out in a private room. Instead, the space was divided into several partitions like you’d see with the tellers at a bank, and it’s not an environment where the students and teachers are alone together.

In any case, there was no wonder he didn’t see her around the booths used for studying.

Looking towards that room, Yasuo saw that Kobayashi was looking out of the door and waving at Yasuo as well, but maybe he had another appointment, so he beckoned to another student who was waiting and went back inside.

“So, were you looking for me?”

At Shouko’s question, Yasuo nodded while looking a little embarrassed.

“Ah, yes. I wanted to apologize for yesterday.”

“Regarding that girl?”

“About that, and also the fact that I wasn’t able to remember who you were, Tatewaki-san.”

“Ah, I don’t really mind about that. Like I said yesterday, I’m aware that I have changed a lot compared to when I was in middle school.”

“I-I see... speaking of which, you were in casual clothes yesterday as well. Tatewaki-san, do you go to Sayamazawa High School, by any chance?”

Sayamazawa High School was a school with a general education curriculum, but unlike the other public high schools in the neighborhood, it did not have a uniform. Most of the students

attended prep school right after school was over, so a person who was in their casual clothes either went home to change before coming to prep school, or was from Sayamazawa High School.

“Yeah, I am. What about it?”

He didn’t have any particular answer to her question, as he assumed that she had waved away his apology and he was just trying to continue the conversation.

“Ah, it’s nothing. I was just thinking, Sayamazawa doesn’t have a uniform, right? I thought girls attached a lot of importance to their school uniforms.”

When he said that, Shouko immediately pointed a finger at him, and exclaimed:

“That’s exactly it!”

“Huh?”

She nodded with a serious expression on her face.

“I picked that school because it doesn’t have a uniform. Also, it’s pretty close to my house.”

The thing about uniforms being important to girls was just Yasuo’s impression, and after hearing her say that so empathetically, he realized that it must be nice to wear whatever clothes you liked to school.

“I-I am...”

“You go to Takeoka, right? I’ve heard.”

“From whom?”

If she had just said “I know”, he would have understood, but he felt compelled to ask since she had said she had heard about it from someone.

Although it made him recall his aloof personality, he didn’t have any contact with Tatewaki Shouko except for the time in middle

school when they were in the same class, and even then, he didn't think that they weren't particularly close.

It was not possible that they had been close friends with shared interests, and in fact, Yasuo could not remember sharing any interests with her.

His experiences during his second year of middle school had been comparatively good, so there was the possibility that she had heard about him from one of their old classmates, or maybe even their class teacher, but even so, Yasuo could not think of any situation where Shouko would find out about Yasuo's choice of school.

However, Shouko replied while also being slightly surprised,
“Even if you ask me that...”

She reacted as if wondering why she wouldn't know about it. However, maybe she remembered something, so she said to Yasuo as if trying to confirm something,

“Yasu-kun, are you the type of person who doesn't really talk to their parents at home?”

A few days ago, he might have denied it. However, judging by the fact that he had only found out about his parents' important past three days ago, he could not deny that there was a lack of communication among members of the Kenzaki family.

Even if he had found out when he was younger that his father was hailed as a Hero in another world, that might have caused its own set of problems.

Taking his silence as affirmation, Shouko nodded as if understanding something.

“Well, I guess it can't be helped. There are even guys in my class who call their mother ‘old hag’. We're at that age in life when we don't see eye-to-eye with our parents at all.”

There was a big difference between Yasuo and other people when

it came to not seeing eye-to-eye with their parents, but he couldn't deny that her statement was true.

"Maybe so."

So he gave a vague answer.

"I mean, even if I didn't know, I would realize as soon as I saw this. Yasu-kun, are you possibly an airhead?"

"Eh? ...Ah."

Shoko was pointing all over Yasuo's body with her finger, and at that point, Yasuo finally realized that he had come here directly from school.

He had left his bag in his booth, but his school's name was sewn into the school's crest on his blazer. Besides, a lot of students from Takeoka High School pass through Tokorozawa, so it wasn't strange if people could identify the school just looking at the design of the uniform.

"...I feel like I keep embarrassing myself lately."

Was he so unused to talking to girls, that he'd get flustered and even forget what he was wearing when he actually did talk to one? His embarrassment over a mistake that he would have never made under normal circumstances caused him to break out into an unpleasant sweat.

"It's okay, you don't have to be that depressed. It's fine, you're just being how you always were."

A number of retorts flew through Yasuo's mind, and maybe because Shouko sensed that, she returned to the original topic of the conversation.

"I first found out about your choice of school quite a long time ago. Maybe it was around the time when we graduated from middle school?"

"I-I see."

That made sense. If it was around that time, maybe because of the tenuous connection they still had through the other students in school, she could have found out about what school he had selected.

“From my mother.”

Oh, come on. There’s no way that could happen. If it was from someone in the same grade, he could have still believed it, but why would Shouko’s mother know what school Yasuo had picked?

It was not even a case of their parents being friends. Even after the incident yesterday, when Diana was enduring her kneeling punishment, his mother only seemed to vaguely remember the last name ‘Tatewaki’, and didn’t act like she actually knew anyone by that name.

“You look like you have no idea what I’m talking about.”

It appeared that Shouko had the bad habit of enjoying his discomfort.

“Let’s see. I guess the easiest way to make you understand would be by bringing you over to my house.”

“Eh!?”

A girl’s house. That was a dimension that felt even farther away than Ante Lande.

Besides, since he had forgotten about her until yesterday, Yasuo felt like he was basically meeting Shouko for the first time. Going over to her house didn’t seem like a good idea, in more ways than one, and considering the situation with Diana and the Shii, it was not a good idea to move about randomly.

“But you know what, I feel like we’re meeting for the first time, so I don’t feel comfortable doing that either. Well, maybe we can save the rest of the ‘clearing the mystery episode’ for next week?”

“A-Ah...”

So basically, he didn’t have to visit her house right now. However,

Yasuo realized that there was a small part of him that had wanted to go, and he felt like holding his head in his hands at how shallow that part of him was. Was he actually an idiot?

“Judging by how you seem to be doing at Takeoka, you can pretty much pick whatever course you want in your future, right? I’ve heard that the deviation value has been rising lately.”

“Ah, I don’t really know. My grades at school aren’t all that great, so it depends on my efforts from now, I guess.”

It was true that in recent years, Takeoka High School had been gradually increasing their grade deviation and number of students who got accepted into college. However, that didn’t mean that all the students who enrolled there became exemplary.

In Yasuo’s case, he was still at the same position that he was during middle school. There was no fear of him failing, but there was probably no chance of him coming out on top either. In that way, he felt like his answer matched his current circumstances, but maybe Shouko took it as him being modest, so she just said, “I see”, and moved on to the next topic.

“So, Yasu-kun, is there anything you want to do after getting into college?”

“Something I want to do in college?”

He had just answered that he had yet to decide on his future course, so why was she asking about the same thing again?

“Like I said, I haven’t decided what college I want to join, and what course I should get into...”

While he was trying to repeat his earlier answer in a more clear way, Shouko shook her head for some reason.

“College and course? That’s not what I’m asking about. I’m asking what you want to do after getting into college.”

Weren’t they the same thing?

“Ahh, well, maybe you’re thinking about something like getting into law school and working towards becoming a lawyer, or getting into medical school and becoming a doctor. So, haven’t you considered anything else?”

“Something else?”

“Like, drinking too much at a party and getting sent to the hospital for alcohol poisoning.”

“What kind of place do you think college is?”

Shouko’s example came so far out of left field that Yasuo unintentionally retorted to her statement.

However, he understood that she was asking about something that he couldn’t do while he was still a high school student who was preparing to take exams.

However, he didn’t even know what college he would be joining, so he had no idea what kind of things he would do once he enrolled there. That’s why. Yasuo said,

“As of now, I...”

He wanted to say “I have nothing I want to do”, but...

“.....I”

He wasn’t able to say it. Shouko kept staring at his face without changing her expression. For some reason, Yasuo felt like he saw a hint of concern in her gaze.

Why was he not able to say that there was nothing he wanted to do right now? He became a third-year student, joined prep school, and began to prepare for his college entrance exams only recently. Although he had undergone guidance counselling at school before, he only recently came to see it as something that would affect his life in the future.

And so, he was already in the spring of his third-year at high school. Before he realized it, he was already at the time when he

couldn't pick whatever college he wanted, but had to decide based on his results in the mock examinations. "I'll go to the best college that I can get into" was a phrase that was often repeated in his class. Yasuo had said it several times as well, and he had also heard it several times from his friends. However, at this moment, Yasuo didn't know what the criteria to select that "best college" was.

Some college close to home? A college with a high standard of education? A college that had a high rate of its students getting employed? A college that was known for preparing students for any kind of difficult exams? A college where special research was carried out? A college that would let him live by himself?

He could select any option and give whatever reason he wanted, but if he did that, he felt like it would not be something he really wanted. It would just be something he heard about from someone else, and would just be an empty reason devoid of anything that he actually wanted to do.

It's not that saying "I'll go to the best college that I can get into" made you a bad person, or one devoid of dreams.

However, Yasuo realized that saying those words now would mean that he could no longer convince himself otherwise about the things he wanted to hold dear.

He did not want to say that there was nothing he wanted to do right now.

However, even if he managed to hide his feelings and impress Shouko with a lie, it would not change the underlying issue.

Even though he had thought that college examinations were one of the biggest events of his life, he was shocked to realize that he had fallen into the pattern of thinking, "As long as I study, some college or another will accept me by next March."

As long as he studied, he would pass the exam. In that case, why did he select a reason as flimsy as 'exams' to oppose his father going to Ante Lande?

His father and mother were currently faced with a decision where they had to weigh their family against Ante Lande, and that decision would affect the rest of their lives. Just how inconsequential were his feelings when he was giving his opinion to those people who were risking their very lives?

The way he was right now, he couldn't even give a concrete opinion about his own future. Maybe his father had sensed that, and that's why he refused to reconsider going to Ante Lande no matter how much Yasuo was against it?

Diana had experienced battles against the Shii where she had risked her life. Asking for Yasuo to hold the same level of resolve as her is frankly impossible, and also unfair. However, on one hand there's Yasuo, who lives in a peaceful country, and can get into college as long as he studies. On the other hand there's Diana, who might lose her home country if the Hero doesn't lend his strength to her cause. If you asked a hundred people to pick between those two choices, all hundred of them would definitely pick Diana.

What's more, their father was also saying proudly that he would pay for Yasuo and Nodoka's education until they graduated from college, and even pay for their marriage ceremonies. Yasuo had no idea how a white collar worker could have that much money in savings.

If that was the case, though, even if his father quit his job and went to Ante Lande, there would be no danger of his family starving due to lack of money. If required, his mother had the option of finding work as well.

What's more, since Yasuo would be graduating from high school soon, he also had the option of not going to college. He could find a job instead, and become independent financially.

The sole reason why Hideo and Madoka were hesitating to choose Ante Lande, was because they didn't want to hurt Yasuo and Nodoka.

“....Thank you so much! For believing in me!”

Could he ever match the level of resolve Diana had demonstrated with her small voice?

Thinking in that way, Yasuo felt depressed.

“....Ah.”

As he imagined Diana’s face, a small light appeared in the depths of the darkness within Yasuo’s heart. That light was like the leftover heat at the tip of lamp’s wick after the flame had gone out, and was a small, unreliable energy.

“Thank you very much. That was the first time anyone other than my parents complimented my singing, so... well...”

“Yasuo, do you know a lot about singing?”

“That’s fantastic! I never had any formal training in singing, so I’m a bit jealous.”

He remembered how his heart had trembled when he heard that beautiful requiem, sung by the beautiful Magitech Knight from another world.

“Yasu-kun, are you still into singing?”

It wasn’t strange for Shouko, who was once his classmate in middle school, to know that he used to be in the Choral Club. However, her impeccable timing in asking this question now caused Yasuo to be unable to hide his surprise.

“...Yeah. Actually, I joined the Choral Club in high school because I wanted to continue singing, but...”

“I see. But you didn’t keep singing?”

“I wasn’t able to. Due to a lack of members, and our advisor transferring to another school, our club was disbanded. On paper, I’m the last president of the club.”

“When did that happen?”

“During the summer of my second year. Basically, once the upperclassmen retired, our fate was sealed. It wasn’t a popular club that had a lot of achievements, so not many people cared that we had to disband.”

“I see. What about it?”

“Yeah, well, Right now, I... I... want to keep singing.”

As this was an answer he arrived at while thinking about it, at some point, his gaze had moved downwards and he was now looking at his own shoes.

Due to that, he missed the fact that his heartfelt answer had caused Shouko’s blank expression to change into a small smile that seemed like she was about to cry, and yet was happy in some way.

The song from another world that he had heard from the living room the other day still resonated within Yasuo’s ears.

Now that he thought about it, the first song that he had learned at the Choral Club in middle school was a prayer as well, although it differed in purpose.

The Doxology, “Gloria in excelsis Deo” |1|, composed by C.Stein.

In his middle school music textbook, it was abbreviated as “Gloria”, and was a four-part harmony that was sung in a foreign language.

Since it was used as a prayer at Mass, there was a version with simplified lyrics and melody, so that young children could sing it as well. To Yasuo, this song only held the significance of being the first song that he had learned to sing in a mixed choir. Although he had known the word ‘Hymn’, he didn’t know that the song “Gloria in excelsis Deo” was written in a language called Latin, and also didn’t understand the significance of what that meant.

For Yasuo, the first song where he had experienced the elation of being perfectly in sync with the other people singing beside him, having their sound, ears, mouths and even the deepest parts of their

brains working in unison, was a song called “Glory”. It was something only a person who was standing there could understand, the feeling of being perfectly in sync with the person standing beside you, and Yasuo desperately wanted to pursue that feeling once again.

Even Yasuo did not think that having such a feeling meant that he had matched his father’s and Diana’s resolve. However, he understood in this moment that this was the bare minimum level of resolve that he needed, that would allow him to stand on the same level as them.

Just like how his father wanted to save Ante Lande, and how Diana wanted to take his father back to Ante Lande, he firmly established what it was that he truly wanted in his mind.

In Yasuo’s case, that was singing.

“It doesn’t have to be a college dedicated to studying music, as long as they have a regular club or a association where they practice singing... Hmm?”

“Haah, so it was like that... I feel like the mystery has been cleared, somewhat.”

Shouko gave him the most gentle smile he had seen from her to date.

“You’ve had a rough time, right?”

“...I think it’s slightly different from having a ‘rough time’”.

Of course, he had not wanted the Choral Club to be shut down, and had struggled quite a bit to prevent that. However, had he truly done everything in his power to prevent it, even putting the rest of his life in high school at risk? Definitely not. Although he had felt a sense of loss when it had happened, it was not at the level where his personality had changed due to feeling despair.

Besides, he wasn’t the kind of person who dedicated their life to their club activities, like you’d see in some teenage dramas. That’s

what he had thought at the time, and even now, he still felt the same.

“You know, the first time I saw you at prep school, Yasu-kun, I barely recognized you.”

It didn’t seem like Shouko was saying that she had forgotten what he looked like.

“You were a very energetic person in middle school, but now you look as though you wish that everyone who is happy with their life would stub their little toe on the corner of a chest of drawers or something.”

“I don’t remember ever cursing someone with that level of detail, but maybe you’re right to some extent.”

It wasn’t at the level where it would be remarked upon, but ever since his club had been shut down, he had certainly lost some of his “drive” in daily life. And before he noticed it, he began to resent those people who still had that “drive”, and got into the habit of comparing himself to them and getting an inferiority complex.

“I don’t think I really stood out that much in middle school, though.”

“Sure, you were never as popular as the kids who were good at sports. But that’s not what I was talking about.”

After saying that, Shouko continued,

“Singing. That’s nice. Very nice, actually.”

“Well, to only realize after being told by someone else, there should be a limit to being dense, I guess.”

When Yasuo said that with a wry smile because he felt embarrassed at being praised all of a sudden, Shouko suddenly made a stern expression.

“Saying things like ‘dense’ only serves to deny your own efforts and the efforts of everyone else. People who do their best at what

they like would never compare themselves to others in such a worthless fashion.”

“Tatewaki-san...?”

Shouko’s statement was so empathetic that Yasuo suddenly felt ashamed of himself. Maybe because Shouko herself realized that her tone which had been gentle until now suddenly changed into one of anger, she looked embarrassed and let out a large sigh.

“It just means that people have different methods of doing their best at something. Having someone you want to catch up to, or someone you want to win against is one thing; however, if you compare yourself on a minute scale against vague standards like the society’s standards and average levels, you won’t understand anything, nothing will change, and nothing will be resolved. All it will achieve is to make you feel bad, so it actually acts against you.”

Maybe the reason why Shouko had changed so much compared to when she was in middle school was hidden behind those words that she blurted out so quickly. However, they hadn’t shared enough time together for Yasuo to ask about that.

“Yasu-kun, you were like that in middle school, right? You would have never done something like ridiculing yourself while comparing yourself to others.”

“I-Is that right? I don’t really remember.”

Certainly, he wasn’t the type of person to stand at the top of the class even in middle school. His didn’t have exceptionally good grades, and while he wasn’t bad at sports, he wasn’t anything special either. Just like in high school, the Choral Club that he was a part of in middle school was not particularly famous, and he didn’t stand in a position where he caught attention, like the members of the student council.

“Do you really not remember?”

Was his life in middle school really just a waste of effort?

“Even the fact that you were the person who told me this, Yasu-kun?”

“.....Eh?”

“You asked me, ‘Ridiculing yourself, putting yourself down, is that really what you want to do? Aren’t you just forcing yourself to go along with the situation while being sad?’You don’t remember? Did you even forget about that? Yasu-kun, don’t you think that’s strange?”

“...Could that be...”

“Grown-up... I’m not really sure what that means, but I won’t say something like that anymore.”

“.....During that exercise when we had to do research about our relatives’ professions?”

Yasuo said that after having another repressed memory dug out by her words, and Shouko looked like she was about to cry, but still gave him a small smile.

“My dad runs a pub, and I didn’t have anyone else I could interview... Well, I thought that running the shop seemed interesting, and when I gave my presentation about that...”

“...Ah, I remember. There was some guy in class who made fun of you, saying stupid stuff about serving alcohol, and running a shady business at night.”

That incident took place during the second year of middle school, when Yasuo gave a presentation about his uncle’s work as a policeman. At that time, Shouko had given an extremely brief explanation of her family’s pub, putting down their daily tasks in an itemized list.

However, after that lesson, some of the mean kids in class latched onto some fragments of her presentation like how they served alcohol to customers, and they did business at night, and made her family’s business out to be some kind of indecent enterprise

and began to make fun of her. Although there were plenty of shops in the current generation that served alcohol and were still family-friendly, and it was common knowledge that those shops also opened in the evening, those kids had just wanted to have fun while teasing Shouko because she would not fight back.

“Well, that is just a part of my dark past that is hard to believe. Right now, I feel like going back in time to punch my younger self for being so scared and timid all the time.”

However, in those days, Shouko had just accepted all of the teasing. She would just give a vague smile each time the teasing began, agree with the comments, and try to ride it out.

“I-I know, right? Shops are supposed to open in the morning, right...?”

“W-Well, since it’s pretty late when people come to the shop, some of them might be s-scary people like you said...”

“W-We’re not part of a big restaurant chain or anything, so, umm, I guess the shop can sometimes get a little dirty...”

Of course, not considering Yasuo, even Shouko didn’t remember all the bad things that were said, but it was not hard to imagine that they were all things that lowered the estimate of her family’s business.

Yasuo, who had always been hearing such comments while sitting behind her, spoke out against it one day. Perhaps the fact that he was always being teased by the same people, who said stuff like “Only sissies join the Choral Club”, “Only boys who are terrible at sports join that club”, and “He’s always singing the songs from some boring textbook” had something to do with it.

“If it’s indecent to work at night, my uncle sometimes works at night too, is that weird?”

When he said that, the kids who had been making fun of Shouko looked threateningly at Yasuo, who had disturbed their fun.

Yasuo was scared for a moment, but he remembered that he held the advantageous card of having a policeman for an uncle, so he continued to speak at a fast pace.

“Policemen often walk about the streets at night. Well, I guess the scary people would think that policemen are scary too.”

“Police boxes and police stations run on tax money and are rarely rebuilt, so they look pretty beat up and dirty. Does that mean that the policemen who work inside are dirty as well?”

After saying this much, he was pretty much in the state of the fox that had borrowed the tiger’s image |2|, but the kids who had been making fun of Shouko unexpectedly withdrew without making a fuss, and didn’t bother her anymore in the future as well.

“Yasu-kun, you don’t think that it’s strange?”

Shouko, who had been completely dispirited by all the teasing, asked him that question, and Yasuo had shook his head.

“I think that running a shop is pretty awesome. It means your father is earning money while relying on his own strength, right? I think it’s a lot more amazing than being a regular salaryman.”

If a regular salaryman heard that, he might get angry, but Yasuo at that time truly felt that way. That’s because, most of the men that a middle-school boy like Yasuo saw were people who put on a suit and went to work at a company, the so-called ‘salarymen’. The middle school boy, who had no idea of how the world worked, believed that anyone could put on a suit, work for a company, and therefore become a salaryman in the course of their life. That’s why he felt a lot of respect for someone who did something different for a living.

“You know, my dad can’t cook anything besides instant ramen. He only puts in some effort when we have a barbecue, but anyways, I think it’s pretty awesome that your dad can cook all kinds of food. It’s like, being a chef really gives off the impression that he’s a

professional!"

"...Really?"

"Yeah. That's why..."

As a middle schooler, Yasuo, had definitely said that.

"Stop doing stuff like putting yourself down, making fun of yourself and trying to ride it out. You might have been smiling, but I bet you didn't feel good at all. I understand how that feels. There are people who make fun of me for joining the Choral Club, they even go so far as to post demeaning comments on online forums. At the beginning, I too laughed while thinking they were right, but ever since the prefectural contest last year when I won a silver medal, I decided that I wouldn't stand for it anymore. Most of those guys who made fun of me weren't regulars on a sports team or anything, they just like to poke their nose in other people's business."

He must have been nervous, because he spoke so rarely with girls.

"That's why, let's make sure to become fine grown-ups who don't enjoy themselves by making fun of others, okay?"

Even thinking back now, he wasn't sure what exactly he was trying to say at that time.

However,

"Grown-up... I'm not really sure what that means, but I won't say something like that anymore."

Shouko had said that while smiling, and looked so cute that Yasuo wondered why he had forgotten about it until now.

"Thank you, Yasu-kun."

"We were in different classes during our third year, but a few days after our graduation, there was a party for the parents at our store. At that time, my mother heard that you had joined Takeoka High School from your mother, Yasu-kun."

That's right, when he was in his third year, his mother had been one of the members of the PTSA council. She must have had a reaction to the name 'Tatewaki' because of her memories from that time.

"I don't know anything about you right now, Yasu-kun, but I'm sure you're still giving it your all."

"I'm not..."

The version of him in Shouko's memories was frighteningly idealized. At the very least, Yasuo did not remember saving Shouko after giving it such deep thought, and he had not lived such a life where he could boast about having given all his effort either.

The way he had lived his life until now was the proof of that.

When he tried to say that to her, she interrupted him.

"Doing your best is different from giving all your effort."

Shouko's words accurately targeted Yasuo's misgivings.

"You're making a face as though you wish that everyone who is living a happy life would slam the main door of their house on their fingers."

"Why are all my curses such petty things in your imagination?"

"I'm sure a lot of stuff happened, but I can tell that you're trying your best to overcome something difficult right now, Yasu-kun. You're making that kind of face."

Since Shouko was looking right at him, Yasuo felt a little embarrassed, but,

"How would you know something like that?"

He still said that. He had actually wanted to ask why she understood so much about him, but he wasn't able to. And then, Shouko went back to having her previous gentle expression, and gave a small smile.

“You forgot about me, Yasu-kun, but I didn’t forget about you. That’s all there is to it.”

“Umm...?”

Yasuo didn’t think that answered his question at all, and tilted his head to one side, but for some reason that made Shouko wrinkle her brows in frustration again, and she let out a small sigh.

“...Is this a good thing, or a bad thing?”

“Eh?”

“No, it’s nothing. By the way, I have to complete another lesson now. What about you, Yasu-kun?”

“Ah, me too.”

“Then let’s meet again some other time, when we’re both free.”

Saying that, Shouko turned on her heel and started walking towards the studying booths without waiting for Yasuo’s answer, just like she did yesterday.

Today, he didn’t go after her.

There was no need to do that.

She had said that they could meet again when they both had free time, after all.

“...Haaaah.”

For now, at least she had agreed not to make the incident from yesterday into a larger issue. Even that was more than he had hoped for, but Shouko had unexpectedly even helped him resolve the large problem that he was currently facing.

No, maybe it was too soon to say that the problem was resolved, but at least he was now able to understand why his words at that time failed to move his father.

Until now, Yasuo had not even tried to understand his father’s position.

Even though Shouko had said such great things about how he was in his second year of middle school, now, as a third year student in high school, he could not even carry out a proper conversation with his friends about his father's work.

He was just using exams and his life after that as an excuse to escape from his current stifling life. He was not doing his best at anything.

“...Doing my best, that’s something I don’t like to think about.”

To him, it was a phrase that was wrapped in bitter memories. He had avoided it so much that it could be said that he was unconsciously rejecting it, and perhaps that was what had lead to this situation.

Back when he was taking exams to get into high school, he had gotten into a rage after speaking to his father over the phone.

However, looking from the perspective of his father who had literally fought with his life on the line, Yasuo’s efforts at that time, and even now, probably didn’t look like he was doing his best.

Of course, Yasuo was not the same as his father, and because he didn’t know about his father’s past, he couldn’t be expected to hold the same level of resolve.

However, things were different now.

He had found out the truth.

Right now, he had a problem in front of him that would take his best efforts and then some, to solve. What was required for that, was...

“Right now, I need to study.”

He got his spirits up and walked towards the hall with the studying booths.

It had been a while since Yasuo had properly concentrated while studying.

Ever since Diana had come to his house, he had not been able to focus at all on his studies at school. Of course, the same was true for the prep school too. Today, however, even though thoughts related to Ante lande would occasionally flit through his head, he was able to immediately move his concentration back to his studies.

Even after getting a hint from Shouko, it wasn't like Yasuo's goals for his future became clear and concrete enough to make his father reconsider going to Ante Lande. Even if he was able to attain a clear goal, that would only be something along the lines of 'studying harder than before'. Telling his father not to go to Ante Lande because he would study harder was completely illogical.

However, if he said something like "I will do my best to get into a university where I can pursue singing seriously, so please don't go to Ante Lande", from his father's perspective, it would look like Yasuo was talking nonsense because neither his words nor the context would make any sense. So he couldn't tell his father about his feelings or his resolve at this stage.

What he needed now was not words. Instead, he needed to look at the various circumstances related to Ante Lande, and do his best to understand how they fit into his own life. Until now, Yasuo had used exams as an excuse to convince himself that the problems of Ante Lande did not have any direct relation to his life.

He hadn't looked at the problem directly. He hadn't believed that it was true. To be honest, he still had some doubts regarding it somewhere in his heart.

However, his father, mother, and Diana were serious about it, and an incident had occurred in front of his eyes that made him understand why they were so serious. The three of them were facing the other world called Ante Lande seriously, and Yasuo decided that he would also join them in facing it seriously. Right now, that was what Yasuo had to do.

"Looks like Tatewaki-san isn't around."

Yasuo returned to the lounge space after completing his lesson, but he didn't see Shouko anywhere.

He had wanted to express his thanks to her once again, but it looked like she still hadn't come out of her booth. In any case, his mother was waiting for him today. As though the vague doubts in Yasuo's mind had been banished during his lesson, Yasuo's mind was now clear and he didn't mistake what he needed to give higher priority to.

For now, he had to return home as quickly as possible so that he could prepare himself for his father's return and the continuation of the discussion from the other day. Although they hadn't exchanged contact information, they would meet again soon enough since they both went to the same prep school. Even if he waited for her here, she would probably have other plans and would not be able to spare much time to talk to him anyways.

For now, he could not afford to mistake whom he should be paying attention to.

"Looks like you're back in the groove today, that's good. Take care on your way home."

"Yes, I'm fine now. Thank you."

After paying a visit to Kobayashi, who was in charge of teaching him, he left the prep school. He looked around his surroundings once, but there was no sight of any strange shadows like the one that had blown away the front door of his house. After walking quickly to the parking lot near the prep school, he saw that the only car there was the one belonging to his family.

After he knocked on the window, his mother realized that he had arrived and unlocked the doors, and he got into the passenger seat.

"Welcome back. How was it?"

"Well, not bad."

It was an exchange of words where both the question and the

answer were not clear as to what they were talking about, but his mother nodded after looking like she had sensed something in him.

“Well, I hope that you’re not wrong.”

“I just managed to find my resolve, so don’t say stuff that will make me lose confidence. Otherwise I won’t feel like doing this anymore.”

“Don’t say something that makes you sound like a kid in elementary school. Well then, let’s go back home. Can you call home and tell them that we’ll be back soon? Also, I send Nodoka a message earlier to order pizza or something for dinner, but if there’s none left, we’ll have to buy something on the way back, so can you ask about that too?”

“Sure.”

Yasuo took his Slimphone out of his pocket and put it to his ear after tapping on the phone number of his residence phone.

“.....?”

“What’s wrong?”

“Nobody’s answering the phone.”

He let the phone ring for a little while longer, but after a few seconds, the answering machine picked up and the automated message began to play. In the current day, the only people who called on the landline apart from relatives or his parents’ friends were people who were selling or soliciting something, so they always kept the answering machine on.

“Maybe she’s in the bath?”

Yasuo said that to suppress his bad premonition, and called the landline once more. Even if Nodoka wasn’t able to answer the phone because she was in the bath, she should be able to hear the phone ringing. In that case, she could ask Diana to bring the phone to her.

“Mom, she’s not picking up the phone.”

“.....!”

Madoka’s face stiffened and she went pale. It was no longer the time to be thinking about what to do for dinner.

“We’re leaving now! Fasten your seat belt properly!”

Without even waiting for Yasuo’s reply, Madoka started the engine and stepped on the gas. The frame of the car shook violently as it jumped forward, but Madoka ignored it and flew out of the parking lot at high speed.

After completing her lesson, Shouko returned to the lounge space and looked at the students who were leaving, but she couldn’t see Yasuo among them.

“Did he leave already?”

Even after waiting for a little longer after the students had left, Shouko still couldn’t find Yasuo, so she let out a small sigh and sat on a bench in the lounge, and then,

“...As I thought, I must have said too much~~~!!”

She leaned forward on the table while holding her head in her hands.

She had said too much. No matter how you looked at it, she had said too much.

“He must have been creeped out... I shouldn’t have gone that far, aaaah!”

When she found out that Yasuo had forgotten about her, her feelings had been half-angry and the other half was feeling that it couldn’t be helped. When she had been his classmate in middle school, she had been entirely different after all.

Her hair had been waist-length, and she had worn glasses. She would never talk in a loud voice when other people were around, and she always avoided eye contact while walking. Her casual

clothes had all been girly designs, and that ‘girly’ design looked like it was from twenty years ago.

“But I couldn’t help it... anyone would want to say that... he had forgotten about everything... that’s just not right.”

That Shouko now had short hair, wore sporty clothes that made her look like she was about to go jogging, and said all kinds of things to her ex-classmate after not meeting him for almost three whole years, so he would definitely...

“...Besides, what’s with him not getting the hint after I said so much...!”

Shouko was resting her head on her arms on the desk, and nursing her injured feelings, when a loud sound came from outside the prep school, and Shouko jumped up in fright.

“W-What was that!?”

She rushed outside the prep school, just in time to see a car leave from the nearby parking lot at a reckless speed.

“Yasu-kun!?”

She only managed to get a quick look at the people inside, but for a second, she thought that she saw someone who looked like Yasuo sitting in the passenger seat.

She couldn’t tell who was driving it, but since the car looked like a regular family car, it might have been his mother or father.

As Shouko watched on in dumbfounded amazement, the car drove off while making a high-pitched squealing sound with its tires.

So someone from his house had come to pick him up. However, why did they have to go off at such a high speed?

“.....Besides...”

Yasuo’s house shouldn’t be too far from here, he should be able to walk there easily. Would his parents really go so far as to pay for a parking spot to come pick him up?

“Well, each family has it’s own issues... Hmm?”

While looking at the tail lights of the car that she thought belonged to Yasuo’s family, she saw that they had stopped at a red light a little further away, and she saw something strange.

“W-What’s that? Exhaust gas?”

There was an strange black substance hanging on to the back of the car. It then began to grow larger, and soon became large enough to even obstruct the tail lamps.

She thought that the car had some engine trouble which was why something strange was coming out of the exhaust pipe, but,

“Eh!?”

The minute the signal turned green, she saw that the substance definitely had a mind of its own, as it seemed to leap upon the roof of the car that Yasuo was sitting in.

After that, the car sped off again while carrying that strange substance, but Shouko stood there for a while unable to believe what she had seen, blinked several times, and even used her eye drops.

“Was it... just my imagination?”

She felt like she had seen something strange because she got too excited after seeing Yasuo after a long time, and her brain was exhausted. After forcibly convincing herself that that’s what happened, Shouko thought that she should also be heading home, when she heard it.

From the direction in which the car had sped off, there was a sound that could only be called an explosion.

“Eh?”

From the fact that several pedestrians stopped to look in that direction, it can be understood just how unexpected that sound was.

“Don’t tell me...”

Shouko began to run in that direction without thinking. That dangerous way of driving. That strange black substance. That was all she had seen, but then there was an explosion in the direction in which both of them had gone. That was more than enough reason to feel an unpleasant premonition.

“.....Uh”

Time seemed to have skipped ahead like when you doze off in bed after already having woken up once.

After realizing that he had fainted for the first time in his life, Yasuo looked around, and,

“Eh?”

For some reason, he was in the sky.

“Wha... Eeeeeeeeeh!?”

“Ah, stop, don’t do that!”

The moment he heard his mother’s voice from above his head, Yasuo’s body was suddenly seized by gravity and he began to fall towards the ground.

However, almost instantly, he was again pulled up by some force that opposed gravity.

“W-W-What is this? It’s cold! Mom, don’t tell me...!!”

After being confused at this situation that he was experiencing for the first time, he craned his neck to look above, and saw his mother whose clothes looked strangely burnt. He understood that his mother was flying in the sky, and that she was carrying him along.

“Don’t struggle. If you fall, you’ll die.”

He already knew that.

The view he could see was smaller than when he had climbed up to the observation deck of the Tokyo Tower once in the past. However, it was pretty surprising that his mother, who was more than ten centimeters shorter than him, was flying in the sky while

holding him in one arm.

Besides, they had been riding in a car until just a little while ago, so he didn't understand at all why he had seemed to lose consciousness for a few seconds only to wake up in the sky where his ears were full of the sound of the wind.

"Maybe we were followed? We were attacked on the way, and the car exploded."

"We were attacked on the way... Eh!?"

He found it hard to understand what his mother was saying because of the sound of the wind, but he didn't need to clarify what had attacked them.

"It appeared on top of the bonnet all of a sudden, pierced through the engine and caused an explosion. I don't think I hit any people, but the car ran into a utility pole and exploded, so I'm afraid of what will happen later on..."

Crashing your car into a utility pole and getting caught up in an explosion were also rare and scary experiences, but it looked like his mother was more worried about how to settle the issue with the authorities later on.

"D-Did you defeat the one that came after us? Was it the one from the other day..."

If they were attacked by a Shii, there was a good chance that it was the one that had destroyed the door of the Kenzaki house. However, his mother shook her head.

"I don't know. It all happened so suddenly, and it was more important for me to avoid hitting someone else on the road."

His mother shot an annoyed glance at her burned hair, and then turned around.

"I think I killed it, but I didn't have the time to confirm its identity."

Yasuo also looked back to see what his mother was looking at, but all he could see was the scenery of Tokorozawa. Yasuo shuddered at hearing the word ‘killed’ coming from his mother who was supposed to just be a housewife, but he understood that the situation was just that grave.

What’s more, he once again realized that his mother had a fighting ability high enough to repulse a surprise attack by an unknown monster.

“Yasuo, look at that.”

“W-What now?”

After looking forward again, he saw that they were headed in the direction of their home. Along the path which was lit by the meager light of street lights, there was one place that was obviously strange.

Just that place was completely dark, as though it was surrounded by a massive, black box.

Even though he had never looked upon the city from above, Yasuo instinctively realized that it was the area in which the Kenzaki house was located.

“We’re in a fix now. It’s just as I’d feared.”

His mother’s voice had more intensity and worry than he had ever heard before.

“The theory that wild monsters followed your father’s scent here is no longer valid.”

The perfectly-shaped box that looked like it was precisely built was not a natural phenomenon, no matter how you look at it.

“What... happened to the city?”

“I don’t know. So, I’m going to speed up a little. You were okay with rollercoasters, if I remember correctly.”

“Even if I wasn’t, I’d endure it in this kind of situation.”

“Okay then, this will be a little hard on your insides. Try not to throw up!”

“Ugh!?”

As soon as she said that, the mother and son sped towards the ground from an impossible height, at an impossible speed and angle.

“I don’t know what might happen, so shield your eyes and head with your bag!”

“Huh!?”

Even before asking for the reason, Yasuo brought his bag up to shield his face, and tensed his body.

“Seeeeeeeeeh!!”

On the other side of the bag, a light as bright as the sun shone in his mother’s fist, and he heard the sound of something breaking into pieces.

“What... is this...”

Shouko dazedly stared at the car that was burning with a rumbling sound on the street.

“Stand back! Please stand back!”

The fire department was already on the scene and were trying to put out the fire, but the car was still giving off small bursts of flame. The police had also rushed to the scene, and were yelling for curious onlookers to keep back. One of the policemen appeared in front of Shouko as well.

“Don’t get too close! It’s still dangerous!”

“B-But, one of my friends was in there...!”

She hadn’t seen the license plate number, nor was she knowledgeable about cars. However, she could still tell that it was the same type of car that she had seen just a few minutes ago in front of the prep school, the one that she thought Yasuo had been

riding in.

There was no doubt about it, it was the same car that she had seen earlier. Shouko was sure of that.

However, the policeman's answer was unexpected.

"There's nobody in the car! Now, please move away quickly!"

"Eh!?"

That was pretty strange in its own way. She looked around, but there was no sight of the passengers being tended to by medical personnel, and the paramedics who had rushed to the scene were standing around, staring at the flames from a distance while having nothing to do.

However, the front portion of the car had pierced deeply into the utility pole, and the frame of the car was also greatly distorted.

What's more, the doors were still closed. Even though they had been in such a serious accident, and the car had even exploded and caught on fire, just how had the people inside managed to get out?

Shouko dazedly stood around while breathing in the offensive smell given off by the burning car, but...

"That's right..."

She muttered in a weak voice and unsteadily walked away from that place.

All she had to go on was an unpleasant premonition.

Maybe Yasuo didn't really have anything to do with the car that had crashed. It could be a car that was coincidentally of the same type, just happened to have an accident nearby. There was only one way to tell for sure.

She just had to visit Yasuo's house.

It was pretty late to be visiting a friend, but she could just make up some random excuse.

She had known where Yasuo's house was since the time when she was in middle school. He had probably forgotten all about it, but Yasuo was the one who had told her where it was.

Shouko had never been inside the house, but even so, she had never forgotten about that teenage boy who lived in that house.

"I'm just worried, just a little worried, that's all..."

An unexpected reunion, and the multiple strange things about Yasuo which were not present in the past.

Shouko began to run off into the night while her breathing grew ragged.

CHAPTER 4

THE CHILDREN'S RESOLVE WILL SOMETIMES EXCEED THE ADULTS' EXPECTATIONS

Nodoka was trembling under her blanket, while gripping her Slimphone and sitting on top of her bed that was in a corner of her room.

She could hear the intermittent sounds of clashing coming from outside, but she was so scared that she was not even able to get out of her bed, let alone go outside to check.

“Mom, hurry up...!!”

Nodoka whispered in a teary voice while gripping her inoperative Slimphone.

However, the only reply she got was a powerful impact that rocked the whole house.

“Kya!?”

A person was slammed into the veranda outside Nodoka's room, and the railings were greatly deformed.

The person slammed into the veranda was Diana, who bore wounds all over her body, and the impact was so powerful that it wouldn't have been surprising if it had torn off the veranda completely and punched a hole in the wall.

“Uuh... I w-wont let you lay a finger of Nodoka...!”

An impact like that would normally shatter all the bones in a person's body and definitely kill them, but Diana still stood up.

“D-Diana-san...!”

Nodoka timidly called out in the direction of the window that was already broken.

“I’m sorry... It’s quite tough, looks like it will take awhile to deal with it...”

Even so, Diana smiled at Nodoka to reassure her, while her face was covered in blood.

“I definitely won’t let them lay a finger on you, Nodoka! Haaaaah!”

After psyching herself up, Diana once again jumped out of the broken window that she had come flying through.

“Hah!”

At the thunderous sound caused by Diana’s superhuman leap, Nodoka once again crouched down.

“Just... Just what is going on!”

Nodoka had not directly seen the battle between Diana and the Shii the day before yesterday, but according to what she had heard from her brother, Diana didn’t seem to have too much trouble against the Shii. However, this time, Diana was being overwhelmed by numbers.

She had been a little on edge while she was at school, but in the end, nothing had happened and the school day ended as usual. She had occasionally wondered if Diana had come to check up on her, but she didn’t see her anywhere, and when she called her house phone, Diana picked up while sounding a little tired and she could hear the sound of the television in the background.

Later, she had sent a message to her mother informing her that there were no problems, and ordered pizza after getting her mother’s permission. She then spent a slightly awkward evening with Diana who definitely looked listless compared to how she was in the morning.

She watched shows on TV that she would not usually watch, and explained what was going on to Diana even though she had not really asked for an explanation, and somehow managed to pass the time until nine o’clock.

“Well, I’ll go up to my room now. You know how to use the bath, right?”

“Yes, Madoka showed me how to use it last night. Good night.”

Nodoka went upstairs to her room as she had to prepare for tomorrow and take care of some other personal things. Just as she closed her room door and let out a sigh, Diana came running up the stairs at a tremendous speed.

“Contact Madoka!”

Diana rushed into her room with almost enough force to destroy the door, yelled that at Nodoka, and pushed her onto the bed.

Nodoka was surprised by Diana’s sudden violent behaviour, but the next instant...

“Woah!”

Her window glass shattered violently, and at the same time, the spot where Nodoka had just been standing blew up forcefully with a roar.

“Guh!”

Diana protected her head from the flying glass and wood splinters, but her arms were mercilessly injured by the shrapnel.

“Diana-san!?”

Nodoka let out a scream, but in the next second, Diana was holding Castor and Pollux in her hands, and a blade of light appeared from each.

“Stay away from the window! Put your blanket over your head for protection! Contact Madoka!”

After shouting that, Diana took a huge leap and flew out of the window.

After that, Diana fought for a long time against enemies that Nodoka couldn’t even see, for what felt like one or two hours. However, Diana just got more injured as time went on, and it didn’t look like

the fight was going to end anytime soon.

“Oh come on, why won’t it work...!”

Nodoka’s Slimphone was heartlessly showing a ‘No Signal’ message, and even ROPE, which was supposed to work over the internet, just kept trying to connect and it didn’t look like it was going to work. Nodoka was curled up in fear, and she didn’t think of trying to use her house phone.

Even if she had thought of it, she would have to go past the window in her room to go downstairs, and the thought of another explosion kept her from moving. At that moment...

“Wha-!”

Amidst the encompassing darkness, light brighter than anything she had ever seen flashed outside, and seared Nodoka’s vision.

“L-Lightning...?”

It looked like a flash of lightning that occurs just before a peal of thunder.

She wasn’t particularly afraid of lightning as a weather phenomenon, but the light outside was so intense that it threw everything in her room into stark relief, and it was certainly not natural.

“W-What was that... !!”

She saw the flash of light another three times through her window, and suddenly, the sounds of Diana fighting outside abruptly stopped.

“.....No way.”

Nodoka didn’t even have the time to regain her wits.

A black, humanoid figure that looked like an incarnation of darkness descended upon the veranda.

In its ‘hands’, it held Diana, who was not moving, still holding her

weapons with limp fingers.

Diana had lost.

However, before Nodoka could register this fact, her eyes were drawn to the face of the otherworld monster, the Shii. Its head looked like an even blacker darkness was etched into an already dark surface, but it certainly had human features. It was a man who was about the same age as her father. He did not look like a Japanese person.

So this is what a Shii, a human who turned into a monster, looked like.

The places where the eyes should be, and the place where the mouth should be, were ominous, and different from the surrounding darkness. Was this light? Or was it flame?

The figure looked at Nodoka with anger and scorn, as flames flickered within its eyes and mouth. A voice issued from its mouth. Or was even that a hallucination caused by fear?

“N-Nodoka... run away...”

Nodoka was frozen in place, unable to move so much as a finger, just like a prey animal that is being glared at by a predator. So this is what true fear was.

A primal fear that is built into all organisms.

A fear that threatens to wipe out all thought.

The aspect of death.

That instant in which you know you’re going to die for certain.

The interior of the house that was bound by darkness... no, from Nodoka’s perspective, she could only think that all the lights had been extinguished, was suddenly illuminated by a different light, and a red light completely different from the light emanating from the Shii’s eyes appeared behind it.

“Don’t you dare lay a finger on my daughteeeeer!!”

Tears flowed out from Nodoka's eyes after hearing that familiar voice.

The flames disappeared from the Shii's face as though it was surprised, and the instant it turned around, it was enveloped in flames as bright as the sun that looked like it would reduce anything to char.

"Nodoka! Are you okay!?"

"Mom!!"

Her mother's form slowly came into view from behind the pillar of flame that was encompassing the Shii. In her hand, she held Diana who was still lying limp after her ordeal with the Shii.

"Diana-san! Is she okay!?"

"Her wounds aren't as bad as they appear... if anything, I'm worried about the state of her mind. Yasuo!"

Nodoka finally noticed the presence of her brother, who had entered her room normally through the door.

"Take care of Diana-chan."

"Woah! Understood... but you really shouldn't be throwing people. Ouch."

Her brother looked just like he always did after coming back from school, except for the dust that covered him from head to toe.

Yasuo managed to catch Diana while making complaints to his mother, but because he was not in the right position to catch her, the unexpected weight of a person threatened to make him fall over.

"Hey, don't drop her."

While Madoka was rebuking Yasuo, the pillar of flame that surrounded the Shii was blown away in an instant. Madoka put herself between the Shii and the others, and glared bitterly at the Shii that had blasted away her flames.

“I guess he’s made of stronger stuff than the one that attacked earlier. A flame of just this level isn’t enough to even put a scratch on him.”

The Shii that looked like a human male stood there, looking like it had not taken any damage from the flames at all.

“...Hideo... Hideo...”

“This is... the voice of the Shii.”

The voice that seemed like it originated from the depths of Hell felt like it ran through their very bones and scraped against their nerves. Along with fear, Nodoka felt like she was about to throw up, but after hearing that voice, Diana, who was being supported by Yasuo, opened her eyes a little.

“...Madoka... That Shii is...”

“I know. You did well to protect Nodoka and hold out for so long.”

“...I’m sorry... I’m sorry...!”

Diana was crying. Was this because she felt powerless at being unable to protect Nodoka?

No, that wasn’t the case.

“It’s okay. You weren’t able to tell us because you were worried about how Hideo and I would react, right? There’s no way I could ever mistake this person for someone else, though, no matter how much time passes. Seeing him again like this was a shock, it’s bad for my heart.”

Madoka glared at the Shii that was once again surrounded by dark flames, while grinding her teeth.

“Seriously, what do you think you’re doing? Hideo and I... and even Erize would never forgive you for making your cute daughter cry like this.”

However, the words that were uttered by Madoka were tinged with an undeniable sense of grief.

“Alex... To think that someone as powerful as you would end up in such a state...”

Madoka Sugiura, the woman who was hailed as the “Rainbow Sage” after the end of their journey fighting against Demon King Kaul, said that while looking at the Shii who had once been a man known as the “Swordmaster”, Alexei Krone, and the husband of her dear friend Erijina.

※

There were no two people within the Resteria Kingdom’s Knights who were on as bad terms as Alexei Krone and Erijina Radagast.

Alexei led the sword and spear units within the Knights, while Erijina led the magicians. The two of them were always at odds, using various strategies to improve the position of their own units even by a little.

Such politics were common in all countries at the time, but having to face the armies of Demon King Kaul without resolving their internal disputes caused Resteria to face repeated failure. Even then, the chasm between the soldiers and the magicians was so deep that neither side showed any intention of burying the hatchet.

It was the arrival of the hero, Hideo, and the magician, Madoka, that caused a change in the situation.

The two of them always fought to protect the most number of people that they could, instead of trying to win glory in battle. That was obvious, since neither of them had any sort of political standing in the country called Resteria, but after watching them fight, both Alexei and Erijina were forced to acknowledge just how foolishly they had been fighting until then.

In the end, both Erijina and Alexei joined Hideo’s party as guides and guards, but their bickering never ceased. However, even then, Madoka could tell that the two of them were irresistibly drawn to each other in spite of their constant fighting.

The two of them never stopped their bickering, even during their travels, but their relationship was one of friendly rivalry; Alexei combined magic with his swordsmanship and created the military art of magical swordsmanship, and Erijina gained the knowledge of weapons that would later become the basis for the creation of Techno Weapons.

After the final battle had ended, in front of Hideo and Madoka who were preparing to return to Japan, Alexei, squirming self-consciously with his burly body and blushing to the tips of his fingers, finally asked Erijina to marry him. Hideo, who was a thick-headed youth, had been greatly surprised.

Madoka was convinced that the two of them would definitely make a great couple, and in fact, when their daughter came looking for Hideo after thirty years, Madoka had to restrain herself from flying back to that strange land immediately and giving her congratulations to her dear friends.

※

“And yet, why did you turn into something like that, leaving Erize and Diana-chan behind!?”

“...Hideo...”

“There’s no way that someone as strong as you would lose to a mere monster. Just what happened!?”

However, the Shii that bore Alexei’s features did not answer her questions.

“...Hideo...”

“Hideo is not here! The only people here are my children, and your daughter!”

“...Hideo.”

“Alexei Krone!”

Madoka’s fierce, yet sad shout caused the air to tremble.

“I cannot allow an existence that bears your features to sin any further... If you refuse to leave, then I, Sugiura Madoka, will be your opponent!”

“...Mado...ka?”

“Yes! I’ve been called by all kinds of embarrassing names since back in the day, but I’m still the ‘Rainbow Sage’! Do you still remember, even after turning into a Shii!? In that case...”

Madoka formed seals with her hands in front of her chest at a high speed.

“I’ll make you remember the power of my fire magic!”

The Rainbow Sage, Madoka, raised her hands that were surrounded by flames above her head while anger and sadness were reflected in her eyes. In that instant, particles of light began to gather around her body.

“...My name is Madoka! The person who will shine light down on the darkness of the land!”

The structure of the chant that Madoka shouted was the same as that of the chant that their father had uttered on that fateful day in the living room, when he summoned the Holy Sword Liutberga.

“Inferno, rush forth! Dawnlight, illuminate! Gather the scorching fire that breaks apart the icy souls! Holy staff of fire, Marlowe!! Answer my call and take form!!”

Along with her dignified chant, Madoka’s appearance made the dark atmosphere waver. And in the next moment...

““.....””

“Ah... this is the true appearance of the Rainbow Sage...”

The siblings, Yasuo and Nodoka could only stand there agape at this unexpected situation, and Diana, who was still being held by Yasuo, let out some words while sounding like she was ecstatic.

That couldn’t be helped.

Along with a flash of light, their mother had transformed into a Magical Lady.

It would be unreasonable to ask the siblings to say something in this situation.

After their father had shown them his Holy Sword that he had used in his youth, and their mother had told them that she had once fought beside him, they should have expected this.

However, even after all the knowledge they had gained about the other world, and steeling their resolve, the visual impact of the scene before them far exceeded the level of their father's Holy Sword and Diana's Magitech weaponry.

Their mother held a staff that gave off a mysterious light... they could still accept this because they knew that she had been a powerful magician in the other world.

However, she was one year younger than Hideo. A forty seven year old woman, no matter how much of a living legend she was, it was unforgivable for her to wear a dress that exposed her shoulders and part of her bare legs under a miniskirt.

Specifically, her upper arms and the area around her collarbone were quite difficult to look at. Also, her bare legs.

““.....””

The son who was in high school, and the daughter who was in middle school, somehow restrained themselves, but even so, the Magical Lady looked at them and,

“The two of you are not getting your allowance this month!”

She made such a ruthless statement.

““But we didn’t even say anything!””



It was a parent-child discussion that was odd on several levels, but basically, it showed that Madoka didn't care much for her own appearance, and she was also perfectly aware of how she must appear to her son and daughter.

"In any case! Alex! You're going to take responsibility for matters having come to such a state!"

Their mother desperately waved her staff, and a small flame issued from the tip.

It was a tiny flame that looked almost like a snowflake, and it gave off such a delicate, beautiful light that Yasuo, Nodoka, and the Shii didn't even feel threatened by it. However...

"Please close your eyes!"

Yasuo and Nodoka instinctively shielded their eyes at Diana's shout.

"Woah!?"

"Kya!?"

Yasuo and Nodoka let out an unintentional shout as their bodies were assaulted by a shock wave and heat from a rapidly expanding explosion, and even Diana had to struggle to withstand the explosion while hanging on to Yasuo.

After the flash of the explosion, they confirmed that the surroundings had once again returned to darkness and raised their heads, only to find that the Shii was nowhere to be seen.

"Alex! Prepare yourself!"

Instead, they saw their mother, who looked like a flaming comet, fly off into the sky that had lost all color.

"I-Incredible."

"Y-Yeah."

In the middle of this indescribable situation, the brother and sister

were truly on the same wavelength.

“T-That’s right! Diana-san, are you okay!?”

Nodoka regained her wits and rushed to Diana who was being held by her brother. Yasuo set Diana down on the floor while still looking at the figure of his mother who was flying in the sky like a strange comet.

Diana’s Magitech equipment was broken in places, and parts of her body that were visible were burned so badly that it was hard to look at. Yasuo couldn’t tell the difference between Castor and Pollux, but even he could tell that one of them was obviously broken and could no longer be used as a weapon.

These were the signs of a frighteningly fierce battle.

“Diana, are you okay?”

“...Please forgive me. My strength...was not enough...”

“That’s not true. Nodoka looks like she doesn’t have a single scratch on her. Thank you for protecting her so desperately.”

“...Was I...really desperate?”

A single teardrop fell from Diana’s eyes.

“My blade became dull. I was not able to fire my magic. That’s because... I mean...”

Yasuo, who was no longer in the confused state that he was in until yesterday, immediately understood what she was trying to say.

“Your dad is really strong, isn’t he?”

Alexei Krone. The name that his mother had shouted out was the name of Diana’s father, and also the name of his mother and father’s dear friend.

“I wasn’t able to fight.... My father... I wasn’t able to seriously attack the Shii that has my father’s appearance. Due to that... Hideo’s house is... and I put Nodoka in danger... I’m so sorry.”

“Your father’s appearance? Diana-san, do you mean...”

“That’s right, Nodoka. The Shii that Madoka is currently fighting against in order to protect us is...”

Diana’s voice dissolved into weeping.

It happened a year after the first sighting of a Shii was reported.

Resteria, who viewed this escalating issue as a serious threat, reached out to the neighboring small kingdoms and put together a large force for the purpose of investigating the former Grand Duchy of Torjesso. The force was led by Diana’s father, General Alexei Krone. This was also Diana’s first field assignment.

Magitech Knights from noble families were usually assigned officer posts near the headquarters where they were in relatively little danger, so that they could work with veterans and slowly build up their experience. As General Alexei’s only daughter, Diana too was given a role as a surveying officer assigned to the base camp, and was not included in the combat division.

However, Resteria’s Magitech Knights didn’t know anything about what kind of creatures the Shii were, so they structured their forces in the same way that they had during the fight with Demon King Kaul. They used the same strategies, such as sending out scouts to discover the locations of groups of monsters, and protected their camp against a surprise attack from the monsters.

If they were fighting demons, or even other humans, that would have been more than enough.

However, just like the Demon King’s stronghold in the previous war, the Shii just appeared from beneath the ground one day. They popped up in various locations inside the base camp itself, like the shoots of some demonic plant breaking through the soil.

Faced with the darkness that rose up from the very ground and took human form, even the world’s strongest Magitech Knights from Resteria who had displayed unrivalled strength during the fight

against Demon King Kaul's forces, collapsed.

Against the investigation force that numbered three thousand people, it was said that there were only three hundred Shii. In spite of having overwhelming odds in terms of numbers, the investigation force from Resteria lost nearly one-third of their numbers.

However, the biggest blow to Resteria, the world, and especially Diana and Erijina, was the news that the person who was once the Hero's companion, the 'Swordmaster' Alexei Krone, was killed in battle. Despite the fact that he was fighting against unknown opponents, nobody expected that General Alexei, who had survived the fierce battle against Demon King Kaul along with the Hero, would come to a humiliating end like having his heart ripped out of his body.

Amidst the confusion of having their base camp assaulted from within, Diana followed the orders of her captain and did her best to perform her role in battle, but it was taking everything they had just to carry out an orderly retreat and so Diana didn't feel like she contributed anything at all. Even worse, while she stood amidst confusion in the bloodstained battlefield, the last thing she had expected was that the person she respected more than anyone in the world, her father, would be taken in battle.

"We took my father's body back to our country where we had a grand state funeral and he was praised as one of the saviors of the world. A special exception was made for him and he was interred in the burial vault that only royalty is allowed to enter. In spite of that.... In spite of that, that Shii is-!!"

It was a tragedy, but Alexei was still put to rest by following the formal procedures of interring the dead. In spite of that, the Shii that appeared before Yasuo and the others had the appearance of Alexei Krone.

At that moment, Yasuo realized something that caused him to

widen his eyes in surprise.

“I’m a full-fledged Magitech Knight! So there’s... nothing to be worried about!”

At that time when the front door of the Kenzaki house had been demolished, Yasuo still held a great deal of mistrust towards Diana. In spite of that, why had she said that there was nothing to worry about because she was full-fledged? Perhaps those words had not been directed at Yasuo, but at her father instead?

“Eh!?”

At that time, outside the window, a large fireball flashed in the sky.

Now was not the time to be thinking of old memories. Their mother was still fighting against that Shii.

Yasuo looked at Diana’s side and left shoulder that had been burned by the Shii.

“Was it your father’s weapon that did it?”

“It was the ‘Regulus’ of lightning. Unlike Castor and Pollux that are mass-produced models, it’s a special model that was made by my mother. When he received the Techno Weapon that my mother had hand-crafted for him, he was as excited as a child and studied desperately to master the lightning and wind magic... no, sorcery, that Hideo specialized in... That’s right, Madoka probably doesn’t know that my father is using a Techno Weapon!”

The instant Diana said that, a large number of lightning flashes and explosions went off in the sky outside the window, and the sky was full of light, as if they were at a fireworks show.

“It looks like she’s working hard.”

In spite of the situation, Yasuo gave a bitter smile.

“I’m sorry to say this when you’re injured both mentally and physically, but we don’t have time to sit here chatting. Can you

stand?”

“...Yasuo, you’re not a kind person, are you?”

Diana pouted a little.

“I’m sorry. The only things I can do are running to a certain Magitech Knight when I’m in danger, and when the situation calls for it, I carry the luggage.”

“If the situation calls for it, I will decline. It appears that I was too heavy for you to carry, Yasuo.”

“Well, I’m sorry for being so weak.”

“Fufu...”

Diana smiled and wiped away the tears that were at the corner of her eyes.

“Are you ready to go?”

Diana nodded slightly to Yasuo’s question and stood up more steadily than expected.

“Let’s get out of here. It looks like Diana’s father is not the only enemy.”

“Eh!? What do you mean!?”

As Nodoka once again wailed in fear, Yasuo explained that a large area around the house had been enclosed in a black, cubic barrier.

“A black, cubic barrier?”

“Yeah. Is there any magic in Ante Lande that can cause such an effect?”

“The most likely cause would be some kind of barrier technique, but the only thing I sensed was the approach of my father... the signal emitted by my father’s Techno Weapon. I didn’t sense any magic or sorcery of such a large scale...”

If even Diana didn’t know what caused it, then it was pointless for Yasuo to think about it, but,

“After breaking through it forcefully, Mom said that it felt different from a usual barrier as well.”

Yasuo didn’t know how to react when his mother described this situation that was the latest in a chain of such bizarre occurrences, in a tone that one would normally use to say that they didn’t like the stock used to prepare the miso soup. However, the fact was that even his mother had never experienced anything like this before.

“The interior of the barrier is... how can I put this? It looks like it’s dead. It’s like a monotone, or as if the color has vanished. What’s more, there are no people around and no sounds to be heard. In spite of that, only the area immediately around our house is this lively, so we can conclude that it was definitely done by someone aiming for us... or rather, aiming for the Hero, Hideo.”

“...I’ve never heard of a technique like that.”

After hearing Yasuo’s explanation, Diana shook her head and said that in a fearful tone.

“A barrier is just a physical wall that is created using magic. A barrier can prevent people from moving from one side of it to the other, but a technique that can alter the space or twist the existence of objects inside it is...”

“Ah, so that’s why my mother was on guard. Was it the Shii that held this kind of power, or perhaps...”

“There’s someone else?”

Yasuo nodded at Diana’s answer.

“However, that person is not trying to get to me or any of us as of now. Depending on how you look at it, they’re also not causing any trouble for the neighbors. So right now, we should just think about how to escape from this person’s field.”

“Y-Yes. I understand.”

Diana nodded at Yasuo’s concise explanation.

“Well then, let’s go. I entered through the main entrance when I came here, and it looks like there’s nothing dangerous on the ground floor. Well, if a Shii does show up, the two of us can’t do anything about it, so Diana, I’m sorry, but please lead the way.”

“H-Hey, Onii-chan, what are you saying? Diana-san is injured, you know!?”

Nodoka was against the idea of sending an injured person into battle, but,

“Well, what other choice do we have? Even if both her arms and legs were broken, Diana would probably still be stronger than me.”

Yasuo rejected Nodoka’s complaint.

“Besides, frankly speaking, this incident occurred because the Resteria Kingdom or whatever failed to appreciate the scope of the situation properly. If the situation is resolved safely, I’m going to have Diana go back and give her report, along with a formal complaint from us.”

“...Yasuo?”

“You can go back and tell them that, if they’re expecting my father to save your world, they need to assign an appropriate budget towards protecting the peace in Japan as well. For the time being, they need to increase the number of Magitech Knights sent here for our protection. It’s a matter of life and death for the entire human race, so you should at least be able to do this much, right?”

“.....”

It looked like Diana was being pushed back by Yasuo’s irrational argument, but she immediately recovered and blurted out,

“Yasuo, you’re *really* not a kind person, are you?”

“After all the trouble you’ve caused for us, asking for this much is normal.”

Yasuo broadly grinned while saying that.

“However, you don’t need to worry. Once this situation is safely resolved and Dad comes back, I’ll present a solution to our problem that Diana, Nodoka, Mom, Dad, I, and everyone else will be able to accept, and make you regret your previous statement.”

“...Onii-chan, what happened to you?”

Nodoka was not able to hide her surprise at how much her brother had changed since yesterday, no, in just half a day.

“Don’t look at me like that. I’m more aware of it than anyone else.”

He had refused to believe. He avoided eye contact. He had run away.

Just what was he running away from?

“Yasuo.”

Diana, the wounded Magitech Knight, smiled as if she was overjoyed.

“You called me by my name for the first time. That alone is enough to make me very happy.”

When it was time to do something, he would do it to his best ability.

Doing one’s best was just a matter of being in the correct state of mind. Even if you didn’t have the strength to fight, or magical abilities, it was one of the several things that you could still do.

“It’s also the first time I’ve called a girl by her first name.”

Even so, he was unable to look at Diana directly because of her beauty, and he couldn’t do anything about the fact that he was too bashful to look her in the eye.

“.....”

However, he immediately noticed Nodoka’s glare that seemed to say “Now’s not the time to be flirting, think about what kind of situation we’re in”, so he hurriedly cleared his throat.

“Ah, actually, Mom and I were attacked by a Shii on the way here. Mom said that she killed it, but I didn’t actually see her do it. Just how do you defeat a Shii?”

The very instant Yasuo said that, a pillar of black flame suddenly rose up behind Nodoka.

At a speed that even Yasuo, who saw it first, couldn’t hope to match, the wounded Diana aimed her remaining Techno Weapon and pulled the trigger.

“Gogaaaaaa!”

Along with the scream of the Shii, a large hole appeared in the wall of Nodoka’s room, and they could also hear the sounds of all sorts of things breaking in Yasuo’s room on the other side.

After once again witnessing the power of Techno Weapons, Yasuo and Nodoka stood dumbfounded, while Diana’s face had an expression like she was thinking, “Now, I’ve done it.”

“...In this way, Shii can be defeated using Techno Weapons or the power of sorcery.”

From the way in which she was immediately able to say that in the next moment, perhaps she just had a stubborn personality.

From Yasuo’s point of view, he expected that a shockwave of that magnitude coming from that direction would cause several things in his room to be destroyed beyond repair, and was nearly overcome by an urge to go check the condition of his room.

“However, the real trouble starts now. This is still just a theory, but if you leave an incapacitated Shii alone, it will eventually disappear as if it is being sucked into the ground. However, there have been a few reports in the past that Shii that were thought to have been defeated, had been seen again.”

“S-So they were resurrected?”

“We were unable to discount the possibility. And then, when the

number of such accounts started to increase, we decided to take appropriate measures against Shii that were defeated... Ahem."

After explaining the horrifying nature of the monsters, Diana gave a small cough, took a small breath, and,

"Oh, wide sky, please welcome him."

She began to sing in a thin voice.

"A song...?"

"This song... is it the one from that time?"

"Oh, wide ocean, please welcome him. Oh, wide land, please welcome him."

Even though he had only heard the melody once before, Yasuo still remembered it perfectly.

"Oh, loved people, please welcome him. May the one who has gone return again someday. May he return, so he may start his journey anew."

A song he had never heard before, sung in a language he didn't understand.

As the words fell from Diana's lips, there was a change in the body of the Shii that was lying prone on the ground.

The black flames that surrounded its body even after it had fallen seemed to vanish all at once, and the body slowly began to crumble.

"Oh, wide universe, please welcome him. Oh, wide universe, please welcome him."

Each time the simple melody and phrase were repeated, the black shadow lost some of its structure, and then,

"Oh, loved one, may you never lose your way on your journey into the universe."

As soon as the song ended, the black monster from another world turned into particles that couldn't be described as ash or soot, and

disappeared into thin air without a sound.

“You said that this song was a requiem, right?”

When Yasuo asked her that, Diana gave a small nod.

“So if the Shii are dead creatures, you just need to give them a proper send-off? It seems like a simple idea, but it kind of makes sense.”

Diana had said that most of the Magitech Knights sang this requiem as a prayer.

Perhaps they had several reasons for doing that, such as increasing the power of the prayer, using it as a ward against misfortune, or grieving for those poor souls who had turned into Shii.

“Right now, this sad prayer is being sung throughout Resteria. Just how many times do we have to repeat something so sad...”

While grieving for the Shii whose name she didn’t even know, Diana was surely thinking about her father who turned into a Shii and was fighting outside, and must have been fighting down an urge to scream. However, neither Yasuo nor Nodoka had the courage to try guess how she felt, and they were unable to even touch her trembling fist.

“Well, then...”

However, the sounds of fierce impacts and the bursts of fire magic were still continuing outside.

“For starters, let’s get out of here. We need to at least get out of this strange space.”

“Yes... you’re right.”

“.....”

Diana and Nodoka both gave small nods.

The three of them glanced at the spot where the Shii had lain until

just a few moments ago, and then made their way across the room that had been turned into a horrible state.

They could still hear the sounds of Madoka fighting against Alexei=Shii high in the sky above them, but Yasuo was in a hurry to get as far away from the house as possible.

In spite of the loud noise, not a single person was on the street to check the cause, no vehicles went by, and the false night sky above them was dyed in a uniform black colour. It would take a mere fifteen minutes to walk to the boundary of the “barrier-like” space that his mother had broken into, but they were assaulted three times on the way by the Shii.

Each time a Shii appeared, it was subdued by Diana and then put to rest with her requiem, but Yasuo and Nodoka were already feeling a sense of mental fatigue from the large changes that had occurred to the neighborhood that they were familiar with.

“O-Onii-chan, are we really going the right way?”

“Yeah, it should be this way.”

Yasuo replied to Nodoka who was almost in tears, but he couldn’t believe that the scenery he was so familiar with could change so much with just a change in color. He was also worried that he might have taken a wrong turn somewhere, and lost his way.

“I’m sure this is the correct direction.”

However, Diana said that confidently.

“So many Shii are appearing from the direction in which we are heading. I’ve rarely had to deal with so many Shii in a row, and I’m not sure what the principle behind this strange space is, but...”

“They’re trying to stop us from escaping?”

“Yes, I think so. I don’t have any proof, but... in some way, it puts me at ease.”

The attacks by the Shii notwithstanding, they hadn’t seen a single

person apart from themselves. That meant that there was no need to worry about the people in Tokorozawa getting assaulted by the Shii that were appearing within this black barrier.

“B-But what if we leave the barrier?”

“...I don’t know what will happen. However, staying here in the middle of the enemy’s technique is not a good idea either. I don’t think that the fight between Madoka and my father will end anytime soon, and in my injured state I cannot hold out for long if the enemy attacks in large numbers. Leaving this barrier now is the most practical solution available to us at the moment.”

After saying that, Diana looked back in the direction of the sound of battle that had become slightly distant.

“Besides, it is possible that the person behind this incident is my father, who is the strongest Shii here. If there was someone else who was controlling the Shii from behind the scenes, I don’t think they’d let us escape so easily now that we’ve come this far away from Madoka, who is our strongest fighting strength. So if we move farther away from my father...”

“So this place is safe, at least for now?”

“I think so.”

It was all just conjecture, an optimistic guess.

However, the only person that Yasuo and Nodoka could depend on was the professional soldier Diana, even if she had a somewhat unreliable side. Yasuo looked at the injured back of Diana, who was walking quickly in front of him while carefully monitoring the surroundings.

The broken Castor that was meant to be used in the right hand was hanging from her belt, and in her left hand, she held the bloodstained Pollux.

If they managed to leave this barrier, should he ignore the consequences and take her straight to a doctor?

While Yasuo was thinking of such things, they arrived at a place that he definitely recognized.

“Over there! That intersection! That’s where the “border” was!”

It was a small intersection within the residential area, and it had a signal with a single lamp. Around this time, it would usually be a blinking yellow light with hardly any people around, but the surroundings were still dyed in a monotone colour.

“There is definitely some kind of barrier here.”

When Diana stretched out her hand while standing at the center of the intersection, she could feel something invisible pressing against her fingertips.

“I guess it was too much to hope for that the broken portion would remain open. If that was the case, there would be no point in constructing this barrier, as it would allow a large number of outsiders to enter the space inside. Considering the fact that we’ve seen only Shii inside, we can say that this barrier is a sort of ‘cloak of invisibility’, created expressly to get at Hideo or the rest of....”

The voice that they heard sounded like the voice of a demon king, come from the pits of Hell.

“That analysis is correct. As expected from a child of Radagast and Krone.”

They were unable to identify the direction from which the sound came. It was a voice dripping with malice, and it seemed to come from every direction as though they were trapped in a soundproof room, and it seemed to make the dark space around them even blacker.

“W-Who’s there!?”

It was a markedly different presence from all the Shii they had faced before. It did not have a strange darkness surrounding it, and the voice was that of a male. What’s more, it was speaking in Japanese.

However, even Diana, the sole combatant in that location, trembled at the irrepressible malice that leaked out from that otherwise flat voice.

An incredible enemy was approaching.

The enemy was intelligent, and was giving off a clear sense of hostility.

It was the first enemy that Diana faced who was intelligent, as she had not experienced battles against Demon King Kaul's forces, nor had she participated in battles against other kingdoms. She had only completed her training as a Magitech Knight, and fought against the Shii which were apparently mindless.

"Leave now, young Magitech Knight of Resteria. An excellent resource such as yourself should stay in your country and gather merit in an ordinary fashion, and work diligently for the sake of your country. There is no need for your to risk your life here."

A black substance, that looked like the soot from a fireplace, began to consolidate in front of them.

Diana, Yasuo, and Nodoka had their voices frozen due to fear, and were unable to make a sound.

The black and red flames that flickered within the soot-like substance was definitely the same as that of a Shii.

The menace of Demon King Kaul, who had once caused the distant world of Ante Lande to descend into chaos, had reappeared. That's what Diana had told the Hero who had once saved that world.

However, Diana did not truly know Demon King Kaul.

Diana had only experienced the battle with Demon King Kaul through her history textbooks, and she had no first hand experience.

"Demon King... Kaul?"

The figure that stood before here while spreading an

overwhelming sense of pressure, fear and darkness was so different from the ‘Demon King Kaul’ that she had imagined, that she just had to ask and make sure.

It looked just like a human.

Very few people had seen Demon King Kaul with their own eyes. Hideo, Madoka, Erijina, and Alexei had encountered him directly, but unlike the portraits of Hideo, all the paintings of Kaul had been done based on hearsay augmented by the artist’s imagination. In any case, the figure that stood before Diana did not match the appearance of any representation of Kaul that she had seen before.

He was about one and a half heads taller than Yasuo. He wore a soot-stained shirt that must have originally been white in colour. His khaki-coloured trousers were held up by suspenders, and he wore leather boots. Overall, he looked like a man with a well-built physique.

In one hand, he held what appeared to be a lantern, but the light emitted by it was not the ominous red colour that they had seen so far, it looked like the light from a regular flame. The other hand was on the edge of the newsboy cap that he wore on his head. Rather than a demon king or a monster, he looked like a twentieth century chimney sweep from England.

Was this the man who had used some means unknown to Diana to purposefully separate Yasuo and his family from the other people, and trap them in this space?

Was this person the true enemy behind the attacks on the Kenzaki family house, and the person who had even managed to enslave the Shii of Alexei Krone, who was once a comrade of the Hero who had saved the world?

Was this person the root cause behind the new disaster that had befallen Ante Lande?

“Demon King Kaul. Demon King. Demon King, eh? He certainly called himself by an arrogant title.”

The moment his face came into view, the unspeakable terror they had had felt until just earlier vanished, and was replaced by a sense of strangeness that was hard to describe. When he spoke, the voice of a man reached their ears.

“Sorry to disappoint you, but I’m not Kaul. I’m not a weakling like Kaul was, and I don’t think I’m as foolish as Kaul was either.”

“W-Weakling!?”

They were talking about a demon who had nearly destroyed an entire planet. What did he mean by calling such a monster a ‘weakling’?

The man chuckled as if enjoying Diana’s reaction. He then took off his newsboy cap and gave an elegant bow.

“Children of the Hero, Hideo. It’s a pleasure to meet you. My name is William Bareig.”

“Hii...”

After seeing his face, Nodoka let out a small scream. The man who called himself William appeared to just be a foreigner, but his left eye was definitely not that of a human.

The evil light of the Shii burned within that eye. It made one think that he wore the newsboy cap low over his eyes to hide that, and it burned strongly with a dark red light that was incomparably brighter compared to the light given off by Alexei or the other Shii that they had encountered. His right eye was a clear blue in colour, and it only emphasized the ominous impression given off by his left eye.

“Sorry for scaring you. No matter how much I disguise my outward appearance, I can’t do anything about this eye.”

Even a smile, if tinged with evil, will cause people to feel fear

Nodoka’s knees grew weak the instant she saw William’s smile, and she sank to the ground as if she no longer had the strength to

remain standing. Yasuo barely managed to remain standing, but it could be seen that he was at his limit, and any small impetus would cause him to break down.

This person was on a far different level from a Shii.

The sense of abnormality, creepiness, and fear that he inspired were fundamentally different from a Shii.

“Ku-!!”

Only the soldier, Diana, was able to summon the energy required and pull the trigger of Pollux to initiate an attack. At this point, the identity of the stranger no longer mattered.

She had no proof, but she could only think of this person called William as a living, human enemy.

“Hmm.”

However, William’s easy smile didn’t falter for a second, and he took the magic bullet from Pollux head-on.

A hole big enough to see through was opened up in William’s body at the point where the magic bullet passed through him. However, there was no blood, and William did not stagger. Instead, as though a ball had been thrown through smoke, the hole soon sealed up and vanished, and he returned to his previous appearance.

“Too bad.”

William looked like he really meant that. He said that in a tone as if he was trying to console Diana, who was standing while looking dumbfounded, and he calmly took a step forward towards the three of them.

“Ugh...”

At that moment, Yasuo also collapsed. He had tried to take a step backwards, but his legs weren’t working properly. While sitting pathetically on the ground, he was still not able to take his eyes off William.

“Y-Yasuo, take Nodoka and go somewhere else. I-I’ll take care of things here...!”

Diana got between William and the other two as if to intercept that gaze, but her voice was also trembling with fear. William stopped walking and gave Diana a pitying look.

“Stop this. You cannot defeat me with your twin swords. I do not wish to injure a beautiful young lady. Please step away.”

“I-I can’t do that!”

Diana shouted that, but it looked like it was directed at herself, rather than William.

“I am a Magitech Knight of Resteria! By the name of my father and mother, I cannot abandon the Kenzaki family, no matter what!”

“You say you cannot abandon them, but what you are attempting is impossible. I would serve as your opponent if you had even the faintest chance of victory, but what you are attempting is similar to a baby challenging a warrior to a brawl. You cannot win, even by a miracle.”

“S-Shut up! Haaaaah!!”

Diana seriously lost her calm at William who was approaching her without even trying to protect himself. Even Yasuo, who was in the place closest to Diana, could not tell when she had moved.

The flashing blade definitely landed upon William’s shoulder.

However,

“That’s why I told you, it is impossible.”

Just like the magic bullet earlier, Pollux’s blade just passed through William’s body with no lasting effect. Let alone his body, even his clothes were completely unharmed, and of course, William was still standing there as though nothing had happened.

“I-Impossible...”

Diana was taken aback by the lack of resistance to her attack, and stopped moving even though she was right in front of her enemy.

It was like when she swung her sword in practice, or attempted to cut the air, there was no resistance at all. Was William's ghostly body even here, in the first place?

"Be at ease. For a human, you are definitely strong. Had you not been crippled by emotion, you might have even defeated your father's shadow. However, you will sometimes run into opponents that you can do nothing against, and incidentally, I am such a one. That's all there is to it."

William placed a hand on Diana's shoulder, and spoke in the tone of a teacher speaking to a student.

For some reason, the sword had passed cleanly through his body as though he was insubstantial, but he was able to push Diana.

He did not hit her, nor did he blast her out of his path. However, Diana was unable to resist William's small action that was meant to move her out of his path. Her body moved several steps to one side, and William easily walked past her.

By the time she realized what had happened and turned around, William was already standing in front of Yasuo and Nodoka, while exposing his back unguardedly to Diana.

"I have prepared a fitting opponent for you to battle. Please play over there for a while. Three of them at once should prove to be good training for you."

"!!"

Three new Shii appeared from the ground behind Diana, who had been looking at William. They had an appearance that even Yasuo was familiar with now. The three Shii raised their shadowy weapons and approached Diana from behind.

While he was frozen in place with fear, Yasuo for some reason thought that one of the Shii held weapons that resembled the Castor

and Pollux that Diana wielded.

“Don’t touch Yasuo and Nodokaaaaaaaa!!!!”

“Diana!!”

Yasuo’s cry did not reach Diana, and Diana’s attack did not reach William. However...

“Aaaaaah!!”

The attacks of the three Shii reached Diana’s back. After missing her strike at William, Diana’s back was pierced by a black bullet, a black spear and a black arrow. Diana was sent flying by the impact and passed right through William’s body, falling to the ground.

There was no doubt about it. One of the Shii was wielding Castor and Pollux.

One of the attacks that had hit Diana was a magic bullet that had been fired from a grip.

Diana had said that it was a mass-produced model. The other two were a spear and a bow. There was no way to tell if those were regular weapons or Techno Weapons, but Diana had said that soldiers of Resteria’s army were also able to use swords, spears, and bows.

And now, the man who had once led Resteria’s Knights was fighting in the sky.

The three creatures, no, the three people were once Magitech Knights of Resteria, just like Diana.

“Diana-san!!”

Diana still tried to rise after hearing Nodoka’s scream, but her body had already been injured in her battle with Alexei’s Shii. After taking an assassin’s blade and bullet to her back, she was no longer able to summon the necessary energy in her hands and legs.

William looked at the form of the young Magitech Knight who was pathetically sprawled on the ground, and lowered his shoulders.

“You should have just stayed back and accepted the training. You could have won against them easily, you know?”

“H-How dare you...”

If Yasuo had the strength, he might have struck out at the man for this insensitive and unworthy comment. However, Yasuo had no power at all.

As far as he could remember, he had never physically fought anyone. Faced with a killing intent and a true monster for the first time in his life, Yasuo’s words were laughably weak.

“I told her that she was no match for me, and that she would be able to have a good fight against the Shii, you know? I’m incomparably stronger than her, so it’s not like I put her off guard and struck her from behind while she was distracted. Why do you still accuse me, I wonder?”

William was calmly analyzing Diana’s actions, as though criticizing the performance of players in yesterday’s soccer game.

It was merely an analysis, and his words didn’t carry even a hint of scorn.

“Besides, she said “Don’t touch them”. She attacked me while assuming that I intended to do you harm. Gross defamation, I tell you. I haven’t said a word about why I’m here, or what I want to do.”

After saying that, William took a step towards Yasuo and Nodoka without sparing another glance at Diana, or the Shii that had stopped moving after defeating her.

“No! Noooo!!”

Nodoka was overcome by fear and screamed. Seeing his little sister in a panic, the flames of self-abandonment rose up within Yasuo, and,

“Nodoka! Run!! Run awaaaaay!!”

Yasuo turned on William who had only taken one step towards them, and threw a desperate punch at him.

“Eh...”

Yasuo had forgotten to breathe due to his fright, his center of gravity was raised, and he had not even formed a proper fist. William looked truly irritated, and avoided Yasuo’s strike by just moving a little to the side.

“You should do things like that when you’re at least on the level of that Magitech Knight.”

William extended his leg and lightly kicked at the leg of Yasuo who was off balance. Yasuo was completely unable to resist it, and his vision suddenly spun around, and he landed pathetically upon the ground.

“There are a lot of comments I want to make, like you shouldn’t be attacking people older than you, or that this is not time to try to act cool. But really, you’re pathetic. You would have been better served by dragging your sister by the hand and running away.”

Those humiliating words were directed at Yasuo’s back, who was still lying on the ground.

“I understand that humans are afraid of this eye of mine, and that can’t be helped. However, I intend to treat you, who are the children of the hero, Hideo, in a courteous and hospitable manner. Well, I suppose your living conditions would change drastically, but I would like the two of you to lend your strength to protect humanity from the tragedy that will befall not just Ante Lande, but this world as well, in the near future.”

What the hell was this man talking about?

“Besides, I have taken my previous mistake into account, and even cut away this space so that your neighbors are not disturbed. If anything, you should be thanking me for my consideration.”

“S-Stop joking! You sent a Shii to attack our car! If not for my

mother's quick thinking, it could have caused a major accident!"

Yasuo couldn't understand what William was talking about, but the incident this time had already caused a disturbance to other people.

When Yasuo shouted that in a trembling voice, William looked truly surprised and widened his eyes.

"Eh? Car? Accident?"

His red eye that was widened in surprise caused Yasuo to start trembling while still lying on the ground.

"Ah, so that's what happened. This is troubling. Well, there's no point making excuses here. I'll let that accusation stand for now."

William muttered to himself and nodded as if he understood something. And then, as if trying to approach the conversation from a different angle, he looked at Nodoka who was still collapsed on the ground and unable to even run away.

"But if that's the case, I'll have to hurry a bit. Now, come with me. I have just the task for the two of you who are children of the Hero."

Nodoka, and Yasuo who was still on the ground, saw it.

Like the tongue of a serpent extending towards its prey, the ominous red light from William's left eye was slowly stretching out towards Nodoka.

Yasuo suddenly realized it.

This was the secret behind how the Shii extracted the hearts from people. This was the mechanism by which the Shii stole the hearts of people, which the Magitech Knights had been unable to discover, despite their experience in battle. William, and the Shii led by him, were attempting to steal their hearts in this black space where they would not be seen by anyone, using that strange light.

"Stop! Nodoka! Run away!"

"Ah, no... No! Diana-san! Save me!!"

Nodoka crawled on all fours towards Diana, but her fear was so great that she wasn't even able to stand.

"The fear will only last a moment, so please don't struggle. If you're afraid, would you like me to bring that Magitech Knight with us as well? Would you be at ease if you had more people around that you know? That young lady is the daughter of Alexei Krone and Erijina Radagast. She is led by her honor as a soldier, and she has a strong will to cover for her inexperience through training. You won't be worried anymore if that girl is by your side, right? Come, now."

"Stop... Stop!!"

Yasuo grabbed the leg of William that was right next to him, but that wasn't enough to stop him.

"N-Nodoka, Yasuo!!"

"Noooooooo!!"

The pitiful screams of the two girls echoed in Yasuo's ears.

Diana and Nodoka were about to be killed without ever knowing what was going on, and without knowing who their enemy really was. He was not even able to feel anger at himself for not being able to do anything, and not having any power.

In spite of the situation, he suddenly recalled the conversation that he had with his mother in the car that morning.

"If both I and the woman you love were about to fall off a cliff, which one of us would you save?"

How meaningless that question was.

That thought exercise only made sense if he had the strength to save at least one person.

Right now, he could offer no resistance as people important to him were about to be taken away.

He had not believed Diana. He had not believed his father's words.

He had not listened to his mother's words.

In the end, he had not found his resolve. Why had he chosen the path that required the most power, when he had no power at all?

If only he had been able to decide earlier, this would not have happened. If this was the result of the three days that he had wasted, he would never be able to forgive himself.

"Still... I gave all my effort to understand what was going on, in my own way...!!"

"Doing your best is different from giving all your effort."

"It was only three days... It's impossible to overturn eighteen years of common sense in just three days!"

"I'm sure you're still giving all your effort right now."

"All these people, they think that because they understand it themselves, they can expect me to understand too? Screw that!"

"I can tell that you're trying your best to overcome something difficult right now."

So what if his father was a hero?

He was just an ordinary person.

He was a powerless child, underage, a student, and a civilian.

That is why, as he still lay on the ground, he grabbed the thing that had fallen within his reach.

"Stooooop!!"

The only thing he could do was to throw it at William.

"Ouch."

However,

"...Eh?"

It hit William's head. It definitely made contact.

Diana's magic bullet and Pollux's blade had no effect on William's

body, but Yasuo had snatched up the broken Castor that Diana had dropped and thrown it at William, and it had hit him.

“Hmm?”

William turned around and looked suspiciously at Yasuo.

Yasuo didn’t know what just happened. However, that was enough for him.

“Diana! I’m borrowing this!!”

While standing up unsteadily, Yasuo almost snatched Pollux from the fallen Diana’s fingers.

“You bastard! Don’t mess around with us!!”

Without even bothering to take careful aim, Yasuo squeezed the trigger of the Techno Weapon that he held for the first time.

“Mu!?”

They were bullets of light that were far smaller than the ones fired by Diana.

However, William avoided them. He actually dodged them.

“Get away from Nodoka!!”

The next bullet he fired grazed William’s waist and ripped his clothes.

“Hey! Onii-chan, you’re going to hit me!”

That bullet broke apart after hitting the ground near Nodoka’s feet, and his sister raised her voice reminding him to be careful.

However, Yasuo didn’t even hear that.

The attacks were landing. For some reason, the bullets he fired were capable of hitting William.

“Diana! Please get Nodoka out of here! I’ll hold him off...!”

“...Seriously... Yasuo, you’re really not kind at all...!”

Diana ran towards Nodoka at a superhuman speed, while leaving

a trail of blood behind her. She carried Nodoka and moved away from William, although she looked unsteady.

“...A word of warning. You’d better not be thinking that you can defeat me. Just because a child can fire a gun, that doesn’t mean he can defeat a trained soldier.”

William spoke in a threatening manner, but Yasuo shouted back at him, partly from anger and partly from excitement.

“S-Shut the hell up! I already know that. But what other choice do I have? Stop your yammering and come at me! Could it be that you’re scared of me? You’re scared of a child with a gun!? You’re confident against a scared little girl, but you can’t do anything against a boy with a weapon?”

“...That’s a really cheap provocation.”

There was no need to even say it, it was definitely a cheap provocation. There was no way that a voice that shrill could be intimidating. He just looked like a sheltered boy who was panicking because he was pushed beyond tolerance. However,

“I will protect Nodoka and Diana. If I’m the only one who can hit you, I have no choice but to do just that!!”

There was no need to say so much to an “enemy”. However, if he didn’t force himself to shout like that, he felt like he would collapse again due to fear.

“Ahhhhh!!”

Yasuo, whose tension had reached the maximum level, pulled the trigger once again.

“Aah, so troublesome... It hurts to get hit by that, you know?”

A child fighting against a soldier. Just like that example, the magic bullets weren’t hitting William anymore.

Still, William was still dodging Yasuo’s attacks. If he got hit, he would receive damage. Diana thought that she should take this

opportunity to get Nodoka out of this black space, or failing that, return to where Madoka was. However,

“Uhh...”

“Look, it’s just like I said.”

The situation did not allow Diana to make either choice. Yasuo, who was continuously firing Pollux recklessly, suddenly collapsed.

That outcome was predictable.

The mechanism of the Techno Weapons worked by using the wielder’s magical energy to fire the magical bullets. Yasuo had been able to fire it until now because some of Diana’s energy had still remained within the weapon. However, once that was exhausted, it would begin drawing the energy from Yasuo, who had not undergone any training as a Magitech Knight. As a result, Yasuo’s body immediately ran out of energy.

William also gave an irritated look at Yasuo, who had collapsed to the ground.

“Stalling for time is a lot harder than it looks. Especially when your ally is wounded, you need to buy a lot more time for them to get away. That means you’re not allowed to exhaust yourself in the meantime. You should have at least paid more attention to your aim.”

“Ugh... Ahh...”

“Well, I should commend you for standing up to me so much in spite of your inexperience. Even most Magitech Knights are incapable of doing that.”

William kicked Pollux and sent it flying far away from Yasuo.

“In that case, taking your reckless bravery into account, I’ll start with you. It’s okay, just like I said earlier, I won’t treat you poorly. It’ll only hurt for a moment.”

Yasuo sensed William’s hand approaching him from above, and

his Shii eye looking at him, but he was unable to even raise his head. All the strength had left his body, and as if he was paralyzed, even moving a single finger was difficult.

He had not even fired ten shots.

Was this all he was capable of? Diana had continued to fight even after being injured. His mother had shown how strong she was. In spite of that, was he going to die here, without taking a single wound, and without understanding what was going on?

“The Hero... Hideo.”

“Hmm?”

Yasuo muttered those words while still lying on the ground, and William furrowed his eyebrows suspiciously.

“The Hero, Hideo... is the person who will obtain victory for new frontiers.”

If only he had that power as well.

“Wings, go forth... Flower petals, take flight.”

Diana had said it as well. That Yasuo was the son of Hideo.

“...Gather the shining azure sunlight.”

Wasn’t that obvious?

That was how it went in all the stories. The protagonist’s son would always have the talent and power to continue where his father left off. However, why didn’t he have that?

“Avatar of the wind, Holy Sword Liutberga... Answer my call and take form.”

No matter what he muttered, it was of no use. He didn’t have anything.

A weak person who had never achieved anything could not do anything except looking to a Hero for salvation.

If there is really such a thing as a Hero... Please save me...

“You... Don’t tell me-!”

For the first time, William lost his relaxed expression. A single pillar of light appeared in that area enclosed by darkness. Was that holy light rising from the body of the collapsed Yasuo? No, the light had appeared just next to Yasuo.

The light continued to rise up from beside Yasuo, and it was illuminating William, who looked like he was unable to move.

“...T-That is...!”

Nodoka had been released from her fear of William, and she was no longer looking at him. Diana didn’t know what had happened to Yasuo, and she waited with bated breath to see what would happen next.

Was it a new enemy? Or was something happening to Yasuo that Diana didn’t know about?

Faced with an enemy she could not hope to beat, Diana had lost her ability to think calmly and was unable to pay attention to Yasuo who was still collapsed on the ground.

That’s why, she didn’t hear it. The son of the Hero, Yasuo, had remembered the incantation to summon the Holy Sword Liutberga, even though he had only heard it once before, and he had recited it in a low voice.

“Your memory is exceptional, Yasuo.”



The voice appeared from within the light.

“I had just crossed Shin-Yokohama station, and I was worried because it would still take me a lot of time to get to Tokorozawa... I never imagined that I would be able to come back in such a manner.”

That was the same voice that had once sown the seeds of courage within the hearts of Diana’s father, mother, and the other people in her country.

“...I thought you were supposed to be in Osaka.....”

Hideo haughtily replied to William, who was frowning.

“Ah. I hurried back because I heard that something blasted my front door to pieces while I was away. Even so, my wife will probably say I was still too late in returning. But if I knew that we could do something like this, I needn’t have wasted my money by hurriedly buying a return ticket on the bullet train. Only Green Car^{|1|} tickets were available, so all my allowance is gone.”

He had neatly barbered hair. A well-used down jacket. A gray suit. A pink, paisley-patterned necktie. Black leather shoes that had become soft with age.

“I don’t know who you are, but it looks like my family and children have been under your care.”

And lastly, he was holding the Holy Sword Liutberga, which was enveloped in a wind that threatened to disperse the darkness.

“The Hero... Hideo Kenzaki.”

William said that name in a voice that was a mixture of hatred and awe.

The central pillar of the Kenzaki Family who would be turning forty-eight this year. It was Kenzaki Hideo, the father of Yasuo and Nodoka.

“That light is-!!”

Madoka, who had been clashing against Alexei in mid-air, stopped moving when she noticed the pillar of light that cut through the darkness. Even Alexei’s Shii had a similar reaction, and its attention was directed towards that light which was like a sun inside this closed world.

“...Hideo”

“Hideo... Hideo...!”

Madoka recalled the times when she used to see that light often, and unintentionally murmured the name of her husband. Now that Alexei had turned into a Shii, what kind of feelings did he have as he called out the name of his old comrade-in-arms?

““Liutberga.””

The voices of the human and the Shii overlapped with each other.

That was the light of hope which had saved a world that was in a place very far away from Japan.

“I need to get a move on as well. It will be very difficult to tell Erize about this encounter with you. I initially thought that your current appearance might have been something created by Kaul or some other evil creature, but that sword technique and that power... It’s really you, isn’t it?”

Madoka muttered that sadly, and then let out large sigh.

“I don’t know how Hideo got here, but now’s not the time to worry about that.”

Madoka looked at her own house, which was a long way below her.

She didn’t sense the presence of Diana and the others there, so she assumed they had got away safely. However, she didn’t notice the other strange presence that had popped up in the vicinity because she was so focused on the battle with Alexei. That showed just how

strong Alexei's Shii was, and how much Madoka's own powers had declined.

"If Hideo is here, then Yasuo and the others will be safe no matter what happens. In that case, I must take the responsibility and make sure to stop you once and for all. Alex..."

Madoka turned a sinister gaze upon Alexei, and the flames on her fists that had blocked Alexei's sword strikes until now grew even stronger.

"I can't let you trouble the children any longer! I must make sure to..."

However, her eyes were filled with tears that were caused by an undeniable sense of sadness.

"I have to kill you. Please forgive me."

She held up the Holy Staff Marlowe, and began to chant.

"They were unexpectedly weak."

Even considering that they were taken off guard, the three Shii that appeared to be former Magitech Knights and which had wounded Diana fell to the ground with a mere three strokes of the Holy Sword.

The person who did that was Hideo, Yasuo's and Nodoka's father. What's more, it looked like he hadn't even moved from his initial location, and his shoes were still as spotless as they had been before.

"I knew they would be no match for you, but to think you'd be this strong..."

William was taken aback by Hideo's strength, but he suddenly looked up at the sky as if he noticed something. The next instant, the colourless sky wavered greatly, and a black mass fell to the ground.

The black mass struck the road with enough force to make a small crater, but the black space was unaffected by it. However, the

remnants of the magical flame, the air, and the dust particles were violently agitated.

“...What is going on? Alex... Just what exactly are the Shii?”

It appeared that Hideo understood the situation immediately after seeing the face of the humanoid monster that had come crashing down. To Hideo, Alexei was a dear friend, as well as being the only person who surpassed him in skill with a sword.

Hideo’s expression was tense as he looked upon this ominous phenomenon that even Alexei could not escape from.

“Diana-chan...”

“...I’m really sorry. I wasn’t able to bring myself to tell you.”

Diana hung her head in shame at Hideo’s unasked question.

On the day Diana had appeared in Japan, she had given a brief summary of the state of affairs to Hideo, Madoka, and Nodoka before Yasuo came home. However, she had not been able to tell them about this.

“Such a mess. I specifically chose this time to act because your absence was a stroke of fortune for me, but I didn’t expect that you would be able to return from such a distance using an unexpected trick like that. My name is William Bareig. Hideo, the Hero, it’s a pleasure to meet you. You unexpectedly look less like a Hero than I expected. You just look like an ordinary middle-aged man.”

At that one word in William’s introduction, Hideo made an unhappy face.

“I was just an ordinary high schooler when I became a Hero, so what’s wrong with me turning into an ordinary middle-aged man after so many years have passed?”

“I see, that makes sense.”

“A Hero just has to save people by defeating the bad guys, but no one taught me how to make a living while leading a normal life.

This is actually far more difficult, you know?”

William smiled happily at this statement.

“Even so, you are still the Hero of the Holy Sword, and your wife is a great magician. Judging from how she attacked her close friend with no hesitation, she still hasn’t lost her spirit as a warrior.”

“...Alex is already dead.”

At that moment, Madoka, who had blasted Alexei out of the sky and was also known as the Rainbow Sage, Madoka Sugiura, landed lightly next to the Hero, Hideo. In her hand, she held the Holy Staff that was wrapped in flames, and which was almost as long as she was tall.

“Ah, if I remember correctly, the clothes are actually the main component of the Holy Staff?”

“If you say anything more, you’re not getting any birthday presents for the next ten years.... So that guy is the leader behind the current incident?”

“Probably.”

Madoka and Hideo glared at William while tensing their bodies.

“I didn’t expect that we would team up again at this age and do something like this, but it feels a little nostalgic.”

“There are limits to everything.”

At that instant, Kenzaki Hideo and Kenzaki Madoka were once again transformed into the Hero, Kenzaki Hideo, and the Magician, Sugiura Madoka.

Yasuo and Nodoka lost their words and were even filled with awe when they looked at the gaze and appearance of these real warriors who had gone through real battles with their lives on the line.

“I thought I could somehow manage against Madoka Sugiura alone, but the odds are definitely against me if I have to fight both of you at once.”

On the other hand, William raised both hands and spoke as if he was ready to surrender.

“I’m not as proficient at fighting directly as the two of you. I’ll retreat for-”

However, William was not able to complete his sentence. At a speed faster than Yasuo and the others could perceive, the Holy Sword Liutberga slashed William diagonally into two pieces.

“Ah...”

“I can’t see any advantage in letting you get away.”

Hideo and Madoka didn’t even let their enemy finish talking. No matter how much Diana had attacked him, it had been like trying to hammer a nail into fog. However, a gruesome red light that looked like blood flowed out of his body now, and his body split into two pieces.

Before William could even make a sound after this attack that exceeded his expectations, a pillar of fire that looked like the exhaust of a rocket engine surrounded his body.

“Hearing what you have to say doesn’t seem like a good idea either.”

Madoka, who had stuck the Holy Staff Marlowe vertically into the ground, spoke coldly.

“Ah... Ahhhh...”

A low male voice could be heard within the roaring flames, perhaps it was William’s death throes.

“A-Amazing... I wasn’t able to do anything against him, but he was defeated in a second...”

Diana alone had been able to follow the movements of those two warriors, but even though she had been able to see them, she didn’t believe for a second that she would be able to do the same thing. Despite their appearance, they showed off their battle techniques

which made one wonder if the two of them were actually close to fifty years old. Diana once again confirmed to herself that the power of these two people would be required to save Ante Lande during this crisis.

However...

“...So it’s here... this... is the entrance...”

Hideo and Madoka raised their eyebrows as if they were surprised.

William had been split in two by the Holy Sword Liutberga and thoroughly roasted by the flames from the Holy Staff Marlowe, but his voice could still be heard from within the flames that were giving off great heat and light.

The sound was just like what Yasuo and the others had heard earlier, it seemed to come from all directions at once.

“As expected... The Hero... Hideo... Demon King Kaul... Comparing them was a waste of time...”

“What? You bastard, what are you saying-”

“...The Hero, Hideo. The Magician, Madoka.... Your power is indeed the real thing. Your blood must have some incredible power hidden within...”

At that moment, the ones who saw “that” inside the flame were not Hideo, Madoka, or Diana.

“Ugh...!?”

“Nooooooooo!!”

Yasuo suddenly felt nauseous, and Nodoka let out a frightened scream. Inside the blinding glare of the fire, only Yasuo and Nodoka had seen it.

A small, black mass the size of a fist.

And the giant eye that appeared to be devouring it.

“Yasuo!?”

“Nodoka!?”

The father and mother realized the change in their son and daughter, and hurried to block William’s flames from their sight. However, even with the world’s strongest father and mother protecting them, the eye continued to stare at Yasuo and Nodoka.

“Return, and tell Ante Lande’s Magitech Knights... Tell Erijina Radagast that we have set our sights upon the Hero, Hideo’s power, and the power that rests in his blood.”

“Eh?”

Diana didn’t even have the time to react to this sudden declaration.

“There’s something there!!”

Along with Madoka’s cry, something unidentifiable rapidly swelled up inside the flames and exploded.

“Yasuo! Get down!”

“Nodoka! Diana-chan! Over here!”

Hideo protected Yasuo, and Madoka protected Nodoka and Diana, The two of them stood in front of the children while turning their backs to the explosion.

After giving off a scorching heat and explosion, the substance broke out of Madoka’s flames and immediately dissolved into the darkness and became invisible.

“...Soot?”

Diana used her finger to rub off a bit of the dirt that was giving off a burnt smell from her cheek, and murmured that.

This phenomenon looked similar to throwing water into a burning fireplace, soot and ash would fly out and dirty the surroundings. Just as the three warriors judged that the large explosion had

ended...

“Ah... It’s the sound of a car...”

Yasuo, who was being hugged by Hideo, noticed the familiar sound that was resounding from far away. At some point, the surroundings had changed from that claustrophobic darkness to the usual scenery of the street at night.

Apart from the bodies of the Shii that were lying on the ground near the five people.

“...Father...”

“Alex...”

Diana and Hideo stood beside Alexei’s Shii, which had not moved after it had fallen out of the sky.

“Is it... over...?”

Yasuo slowly stood up as if unwilling to believe that it was true.

“Nodoka...”

“Uuu... sob... Mom...”

Madoka hugged Nodoka who was unable to calm down.

“It looks like something unimaginable is happening.”

“Yes...”

“...Hide...o.... The Hero... Hide...”

“Isn’t there anything we can do for him?”

“...No.”

He felt like he could hear Diana grinding her teeth.

“There’s no time. Will you finish it?”

The Hero of Salvation asked the young Magitech Knight.

“Will you curse me, or instead take up the burden of this sin that you will never be able to forget?”

“I will take this sin upon myself.”

Diana replied without hesitating.

“I wasn’t able to protect Yasuo and Nodoka. I wasn’t able to carry out my duty. Even so.... I still said it. That I was full-fledged.”

“...I see.”

“Maybe I don’t understand it yet because I’m still young. But Hideo, Madoka...”

Diana spoke while activating her Techno Weapon.

“My relation with Alexei Krone is far deeper and stronger than yours. That’s why... I need to do this.”

“I see.”

“Yes.”

The Hero, Hideo, and The Magician, Madoka, simply nodded.

“Diana...”

Yasuo realized what Diana intended to do and called out to her before he could stop himself. Diana turned around slightly, and smiled while her eyes were filled with tears.

“It’s okay. I’m Alexei Krone’s daughter. I’m a Magitech Knight of Resteria, after all.”

Compared to her resolve, what could Yasuo, who had been unable to hold his resolve to the end, say in return?

“...Goodbye... Father...!”

Diana’s buried the blade of Pollux into the chest of the Shii.

The flaming red eyes that were the signature of the Shii were now mere flickers, and as they watched, they faded away into the shadow.

Diana stood in front of her father’s Shii that had lost its ominous air, took a deep breath, and tried to sing the requiem. However...

“Oh... wide sky... please—”

She was not able to sing it.

Diana's heart was not strong enough to sing the requiem for her father, who had just died for a second time.

Her lips trembled, tears flowed from her eyes without stopping, and her sobbing made her unable to keep singing.

At this rate, the Shii would get sucked into the ground, and might appear again someday as a champion of the dead to torment the living.

However, Hideo and Madoka only looked on, and didn't try to do anything else.

“Oh, wide sky, please welcome him.”

That's why; Yasuo began to sing that song in a low voice.

Diana suddenly raised her head, Hideo glanced at Yasuo, Madoka looked surprised at hearing the words of the song, and Nodoka remembered where she had heard that song before and looked at the Shii.

“Yasuo...”

“That song... it's in the language of Resteria...?”

“Oh, wide ocean, please welcome him. Oh, wide land, please welcome him.”

It was a repetition of simple lyrics and a simple melody.

“Oh, loved people, please welcome him. May the one who has gone return again someday. May he return, so he may start his journey anew.”

He had heard that song several times.

After hearing it so many times, he could not call himself the President of the Choral Club if he could not at least replicate the melody and imitate the sound of the lyrics.

“Oh, wide universe, please welcome him. Oh, wide universe, please welcome him.”

As he was singing this song for the first time, it really couldn't be said that he had sung it well.

However, he sang it in a trembling voice which still showed traces of fear, while relying desperately on his memory and putting his feelings into the song. Perhaps that's what caused the song to have an effect.

The black bodies of Alexei and the Magitech Knights who had become Shii began to crumble rapidly, turned into fine soot, and vanished as if evaporating into thin air.

“Ahh...”

Diana looked up as if saying farewell to the soot that had disappeared, while having a expression that was filled with mourning, peace, sadness, and happiness. And then she noticed...

“...The sky.”

At some point, the black space that had robbed the surroundings of color had completely vanished, and the usual night sky was once again visible with a few stars showing brightly.

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“W-What was that?”

Shouko had stood motionless for some time, staring at the sky.

A bright pillar of light had shot up into the sky in the direction of Yasuo's home that she was trying to get to, and Shouko wondered for a second if there was a pachinko shop in that area. The route to the Kenzaki family house had seemed simple in her head, but it was actually more complicated, and there was a complex network of streets and intersections that all looked the same.

In spite of her efforts, she felt like she had entered a forest that confused her sense of direction, and she was soon completely lost

even though she hadn't walked all that far. It took her twenty minutes after the appearance of the mysterious "spotlight" until she found the house with the "Kenzaki" nameplate outside.

"...Is this the place?"

Shouko had walked so much that she was sweating lightly in spite of the cold weather. As shown on the news, the front door of the house appeared to have been mercilessly destroyed, and a blue vinyl tarp had been hung over the entrance in an attempt to keep some privacy.

There was no car in the parking space, but the lights were switched on on both the ground and first floors, showing that the residents were at home.

All of a sudden, Shouko began to worry if she was being too nosy on top of having crossed a line earlier.

She thought that she had seen Yasuo sitting in the car that had raced out of the parking garage, but she might have been mistaken. After seeing the location of the accident, she had thought it would be easy to make up an excuse for visiting so late, but if Yasuo had really not been involved in the accident, what kind of excuse could she give?

It would be good if Yasuo came outside the house, but what should she do if some other members of his family or that foreigner girl came out and saw her?

Shouko felt like she was doing something incredibly stupid, and she was unable to move her hand to push the intercom button that she had been intending to push just a few seconds ago.

Shouko looked at her mobile phone, and saw that the time was already 10:45 PM. It was quite a problem for a student to be visiting someone else's house at this time.

"W-What should I do... Really, what should I do..."

It happened at that moment, when Shouko was about to about to

lose her calm entirely.

“I wonder what this means. Is it back to normal?”

Along with the sound of a window opening, she heard Yasuo’s voice coming from the veranda on the second floor.

“You’re not going to tell me that I imagined it, right?”

“Of course not... but it looks perfectly fine now, so isn’t that good enough? Come on, Onii-chan, get out of my room already! Mom is downstairs with Diana-san, and...”

“Ah, I understand. You’re right. For now, I should...”

She heard the sound of a window closing, and the sound of Yasuo’s voice and the voice of the girl who seemed to be his little sister were cut off.

“.....”

Shouko had unintentionally held her breath when she heard Yasuo’s voice, and now she felt like all the energy was leaving her body through her legs.

“...What the heck.”

Yasuo had returned to his house.

The girl who seemed to be his sister had said something about ‘Mom’ and ‘Diana-san’, so obviously his mother was at home as well. ‘Diana’ might be the name of the mysterious foreigner girl she had seen the other day.

“...What the heck.”

All the energy and willpower left her body.

Thinking of just how stupidly she had been behaving over the past one hour, she began to cry.

Now that she had calmed down, her body temperature began to fall rapidly, and she started to feel cold because of the sweat.

“...Getting all worked up by myself, I feel like such an idiot.”

It had just been a case of her jumping to conclusions based on mistaken information. For some reason, Yasuo had hurried home after finishing his lessons. There was no car in the house, but that might have been because his father was using it, or they might have sent it out for repairs.

In the first place, if the car she had seen coming out of the parking garage did not belong to the Kenzaki family, then Yasuo was completely unrelated to that accident. True, there was someone out there who had caused that accident, but Shouko had absolutely no reason to track them down.

“...I’m such an idiot.”

Shouko slowly began to walk down the street, leaving the Kenzaki family house behind her.

“I said all those things so arrogantly, but in the end I was just spinning my wheels in the same place... It feels like I haven’t changed at all since middle-school.”

Suddenly feeling even colder, Shouko gathered the material of her jumper closer around herself, and increased her pace of walking. She hurried away as if she was trying to escape from something that was in between the Kenzaki house and her. She turned at an intersection where a yellow traffic light was blinking, and continued to walk without looking back.

A while after Shouko had passed, some black particles that looked like soot could be seen, blown about by the wind and landing at that intersection.

The soot left black, shadow-like marks carved into the center of the intersection.

After a while, the soot started to move in the same direction that Shouko had gone, and disappeared as if it was following her.

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The window glass, the floor of the room, and even the wall in

between the rooms had mysteriously reverted back to the state before the fight with the Shii. After confirming this fact, Yasuo and Nodoka came back downstairs to see...

“What should we do... The car... What should we do...”

They had no idea what to say to their mother who was sitting on the sofa while holding her head.

She had dispelled her Magical Lady uniform, but she had forgotten to change out of her burnt clothes, so it appeared that she was pretty agitated.

At her side, their father’s hand was emitting a faint light and he was holding it above Diana’s injuries. It was probably some spell of healing or some similar sorcery, but it felt extremely strange to see a middle-aged man in a suit cast a spell of healing on the female Magitech Knight.

“Would it be useless to file a report with the police that the car was stolen earlier?”

“The parking garage opposite Yasuo’s prep school has surveillance cameras. I didn’t come out even once after I parked the car there, and I’m sure they’ve also recorded Yasuo coming back inside after his lessons were done.”

The wife instantly destroyed her husband’s naive question.

“On top of that, now that I think about it about it, I sped out of there without paying the parking fee...”

“Ah, that’s right.”

Yasuo remembered that the rear wheels of the car had made an incredibly loud noise and jumped upwards when they left the garage. That had probably been caused by the car hitting and destroying the barrier meant to stop the car from moving.

“Ah, but I made sure to vaporize the number plates of the car right after I defeated the Shii.”

““.....””

Yasuo and Nodoka didn't know how to respond to this statement that would even surprise a band of thieves.

True, it would probably be a simple matter for their mother to vaporize the number plates of a car using the power of her magical flames, but to think she would actually use that otherworldly power to conceal the evidence of her crime...

After that, their father began to speak.

“Just getting rid of the license plates isn't good enough. The body of the car and the other components each have their own serial numbers, and they can easily be used to identify the owner. Really, we seem to be in a fix.”

He made a grave face.

Both Yasuo and Nodoka felt like their parents were going about it the wrong way, but it was not like they had any better ideas, so they refrained from commenting on this issue.

“...The top floor looks fine, nothing seems to be broken.”

The two of them just reported in this way, and upon hearing that,
“...Thank goodness.”

Yasuo heard Diana whisper that to herself.

“Yeah, that's good, but I wish that weird man had done the same during the incident with the front door too.”

Perhaps because their father still felt guilty at not being reachable during the first attack by the Shii, he immediately added his own comment after Yasuo.

“At any rate, if the police get involved again, it might become a problem for me at work. Diana-chan, do you mind if my wife takes over the healing? I'm going out for a bit, I'll be back soon.”

“Eh? Ahh, sure.”

Diana had received some serious wounds, but the bleeding had stopped now. After confirming that, their father put his down jacket back on and prepared to go out again.

“Ah, Dad, where are you going?”

“Oh, it’s nothing. I’m just going over there for a bit.”

“...Dad.”

Even Nodoka didn’t know what to say to her father in such a situation.

Their father probably intended to use his Hero’s power to completely destroy all evidence of the accident that their mother had left behind.

Are there two really saviours of Ante Lande? Yasuo felt like he could not understand the thought process of his parents at all.

After his father left the house, his mother gave a small sigh, stood up, and continued healing Diana. Diana bowed her head slightly to Yasuo and spoke.

“Yasuo... Thank you so much. You sent my father off in my stead.”

“...Ah, that.”

Yasuo looked away uneasily, and sat down on the sofa.

“But was that really because of my power? It was just rote memorization. I didn’t really pay attention to the pronunciation, and my voice was trembling like mad...”

“No, that doesn’t matter.”

Diana gently shook her head.

“I don’t know if you have any power of sorcery, Yasuo. But... you grieved for my father.... a monster from a different world, even after he caused so much trouble for you. That alone makes me very happy.”

Grieving for the Shii. Did he really have such a lofty emotion in

mind when he had done that?

Yasuo had still not completely shaken off his fear of that man called William, and he honestly didn't think that he had sung while having such a pure emotion.

He had just not been able to stand there and watch without doing anything.

Diana had suffered so much, and yet she had tried her hardest to use her own blade to send her father off, who was facing death for a second time. When Yasuo saw that, he wanted to do the only thing he was capable of doing, and that was singing the requiem song of their world.

He had not sung for Alexei. He had sung it for Diana's sake.

He had sung it for his own sake, as he could do nothing else.

However, explaining this to Diana now would be pointless. He had no reason to refuse Diana's gratitude either.

Perhaps Diana had sensed something of Yasuo's thoughts, she was hanging her head and had stopped talking.

"In any case, Dad might actually have to quit his job in order to protect our neighborhood, even without considering the situation on Ante Lande. We've found out that Mom and Diana-san can't handle the situation by themselves, after all."

Nodoka said that in an intentionally dry tone, maybe because she couldn't handle the uneasy atmosphere anymore.

"Diana-san's Techno Weapon didn't work against that William at all, so even if other Magitech Knights are sent here, we won't be able to feel at ease."

"Uu... T-That's..."

"That's true."

Neither Diana nor her mother rejected Nodoka's words. Although Diana was able to fight against the Shii, she had been completely

helpless against William. If some powerful Shii on Alexei's level appeared again, or William came back, there was no way to assure Yasuo and Nodoka's safety if Hideo wasn't present and their mother was fighting.

This time, they had been able to use Yasuo's "space-time-transcending complaint to the parents" chant to call Hideo here as reinforcements, but they didn't know if Nodoka would be able to call for help in the same way. In the worst case, their mother might be forced to make a decision to protect one child while giving up on the other.

As a result of that decision, Yasuo might be the one to die. Or it could be Nodoka. Or it could be Diana.

Most importantly, people who had nothing to do with this situation might also die.

"That would be bad."

Why did this have to happen right after he decided to live his life earnestly as Kenzaki Yasuo, a student who was preparing for exams?

"No matter what the circumstances are, I probably won't be able to make that choice. In order to do my best, there is no other choice."

"Eh?"

"Onii-chan?"

"Ahh... I'm back. It was easier than I expected it to be.... What's wrong?"

His mother, Nodoka, and his father, who came back looking like he had accomplished something, all looked at Yasuo who was talking to himself.

"Dad, Mom... and Diana as well."

Yasuo held his breath for a second and went over his idea once

again.

There was nothing that he could do. This was such a pain. The future that he had envisioned for himself would be destroyed beyond repair. Don't do it. Nothing good will happen even if a social outcast like himself takes action.

“I...”

Know your place. Doing something so troublesome will only result in getting hurt, physically as well as mentally. Such things should be left to the professionals. You don't even have any experience, what can you do? You couldn't even protect the place where you live, all you did was to complain about others while letting your opportunities slip out of your fingers.

“I...”

If you try to act cool, you'll regret it later on. Have you even achieved a single thing worthy of note until now? Hard work means nothing, only people with talent who have lived in a blessed environment can do something like this. Do you think you're special in some way? Are you actually an idiot?

“I know it's too late... and nothing can be done...”

“Thank you so much, for believing me!”

“I don't know anything about you right now, Yasu-kun, but I'm sure you're still giving it your all.”

He was just someone who would complain about things while looking at the setting sun. Compared to the girl from another world who held such strong conviction, he was worth nothing. That's why...

“I... want to protect Diana.”

“Yasuo!?”

At his sudden proclamation, Diana shouted out in surprise while blushing furiously.

“I want to protect Nodoka, and if possible, I want to protect this place that I was born in as well... But as I am now, I can’t do anything. That’s why, I feel sorry for Diana, but I don’t want you to go to Ante Lande yet, Dad. Right now, I still need to be protected by you, Mom, and Diana. That’s why...”

“Y-Yasuo, you don’t mean...”

“Onii-chan, what are you talking about all of a sudden?”

Unlike his mother and sister who spoke up because they sensed something strange about Yasuo, his father stayed silent.

“Can you, Diana, and Ante Lande... Can you all just wait for another year? I know I’ll probably cause a lot of trouble for everyone, but in that time, I will grow stronger. I’ll grow strong enough to protect everyone, like Dad did in the past.”

Yasuo looked straight at his father, the Hero who had once saved a world.

The Hero looked back at him with regret, and just a hint of happiness mixed into his expression.

Just how did his father live and fight in the past, and how did he manage to come back?

How was he working now, how was he earning money, and how was he able to provide for his family?

Right now, Yasuo was not able to find the answers to these questions.

However, if he intended to listen to his father’s true feelings some day, he must now take a step forward.

Encouraged by the look in his father’s eyes, Kenzaki Yasuo felt that the old version of him who had turned his back on the brass band and the invitation from his friend to join the Theatre Club and walked into the sunset had faded, and he could once again look forward to his school which was supposed to be filled with hopes

and dreams.

“Once I get into college, I’m thinking about becoming a hero in another world.”

Born as the son of a Hero, but raised without knowing anything. For the first time in his life, this young man picked the path that he would follow in life, of his own volition.

FINAL CHAPTER

THE MANNER OF DEPARTURE

“It’s been a long time, Madoka, Hideo. I would have preferred to meet you again under different circumstances, but I feel that I have no option but to rely on your fame even after thirty years have passed.... By the way... Alex was killed in battle. You must have already heard about it from Diana, about the monsters called Shii. I’ve gotten a lot older, and I’m sure the same is true for both of you. However... We’ve tried everything, and you’re our only remaining option...”

“I wish I could have seen this earlier.”

Madoka absent-mindedly muttered that while watching the low quality image that was playing on the television.

The face of her old friend had indeed aged considerably, but the way she looked while trying to conceal that she had lost someone important, and the way she tried to deal with that loss by immersing herself in the pressure of her work was just like the Erijina Radagast she remembered from the past.

“Wow, Erize’s gotten old... Ouch!”

She wordlessly silenced her husband who said something unnecessary while sitting beside her.

The day after Hideo returned, he had taken Diana’s 8mm tape to a friend who was a collector of old cameras and recording equipment, and had it converted to a DVD format right away.

It had been ten days since the attack by Alexei’s Shii and William, but the Kenzaki family’s surroundings had still not returned to normal. As for the car, Hideo had conducted an air raid and used a flash fire magic against the remains of the car that were already burned to a crisp at the site of the accident, and melted it beyond all

recognition. In this way, the issue was brought to a conclusion, at least as far as the Kenzaki family was concerned.

As for what to do about the paperwork for decommissioning the vehicle and the vehicle insurance, they were still thinking about it. They had told the neighbors that a relative had borrowed the car, and planned to make up some other excuse once things had calmed down a bit.

Regarding the front door, they had contacted the real estate agency who had helped them when they bought this house, and got an estimation for the repairs. However, it looked like the repairs would still take some time to start because the investigations by the police, fire department, and the gas company were still dragging on.

Diana was still living at the Kenzaki house, acting as a guard for Yasuo and Nodoka.

After that incident, Hideo took three days of paid leave from work and stayed at home, but nothing related to Ante Lande or the Shii happened during that time. Instead, he was backed into a corner dealing with the real estate agency, the insurance company, the police, and the fire department.

If Yasuo chanted the incantation to summon Liutberga, Hideo would be forcefully summoned along with it. This phenomenon was confirmed after conducting several experiments and they determined that he could do it again if the need arose.

However, Nodoka was not able to summon Hideo by chanting the same incantation, and she wasn't able to summon her mother by chanting the incantation for the Holy Staff Marlowe either.

“That’s unfair!”

Nodoka had become very angry when they realized that, but for now, they established a routine where Hideo would protect Yasuo, and Diana and Madoka would take turns protecting Nodoka depending on the situation.

Even so, there were many gaps in this plan. Especially for Yasuo's protection, even though Hideo was in charge of protecting him. For example, if Hideo was to give off light and vanish during a meeting at work, he was sure to get asked questions like, "Kenzaki-kun, just what happened to you the other day?"

All of them, including Diana, keenly realized the importance of contacting Resteria for help in maintaining the peace of the Kenzaki family and the surrounding area.

"Right now, I think I understand how Yasuo felt."

"What do you mean?"

"When you first said that you wanted to go to Ante Lande, remember how much that boy resisted?"

"Ah."

Hideo recalled that time while smiling bitterly.

"I've always been bad at dealing with situations like that. Thinking back now, there must have been a better way to put it, but I just panicked."

"It couldn't be helped. This happened all of a sudden. It's just..."

Madoka sighed while listening to Erijina's explanation, which was basically the same things that Diana had already told them.

"If that child comes out and says, "I want to be a Hero", then I really won't be able to stay calm."

"Even though the two of us did all sorts of insane stuff."

"That's exactly why. I don't want my children to ever do anything that dangerous."

"Ah. The two of them probably said all that stuff because they didn't want their parents to do anything dangerous either."

"That's why, I now understand why Yasuo was so stubborn about it. Haah."

Erize was still in the middle of her explanation, but Madoka turned the DVD player off and put her head down on the table.

“The parents’ karma will fall upon their children... I don’t even want to think about such a thing.”

“We even gave them those names while praying for that not to happen. |1|”

Hideo said that bitterly.

Erize’s explanation contained a lot of information regarding Alexei and the Shii, but there was no information at all regarding the man who called himself William. Probably, even Erijina was not aware of that man’s existence.

Both Hideo and Madoka were aware that the darkness that enveloped Ante Lande was threatening to get their son and daughter and even their friends involved, and were incredibly uneasy about it.

The ex-Hero and ex-great magician both gave a deep sigh inside that dark room, which seemed to come from the depth of their experiences over their lifetime.

“So, is Yasuo still working hard?”

※

The sun was shining brightly in the sky, but the winds of the winter stubbornly refused to retreat, mercilessly assaulting the pedestrians on the street and making them think spring was still far away.

In the sunny residential area where people were coming and going, the Kenzaki house was still showing its broken doorway.

Nodoka took a sports drink from the refrigerator in the kitchen, went through the main door, and walked around to the backyard.

Over there, she saw Diana who was for some reason wearing a tracksuit that had been purchased at a discount from a

neighborhood clothing store, and Yasuo, who was covered in sweat and reading a reference book.

“Huh? I thought you were doing physical training?”

“Yasuo’s strength was at its limit, so we’re studying theory now.”

“Ehh, already?”

Not even an hour had passed since breakfast, when Yasuo had said that he would be learning basic Magitech Soldier Training under Diana’s guidance.

Nodoka had uncharacteristically decided to bring him a sports drink because he had looked like he was sweating a lot, only to find him in such a condition.

“This illustration is very easy to understand, so we’ll start with this one, okay? It’s the most fundamental concept in aiming sorcery. Imagine that there is a right-angled triangle on a plane in front of you. The sum of the squares of the sides that make up the right angle is equal to the square of the hypotenuse. Are you with me so far?”

“No, I’m not. Please wait for a bit.”

Diana was wearing a cheap tracksuit and waving Pollux like a bamboo sword while conducting a lesson, and her brother was hurriedly taking notes while looking harried. This was a sight worthy of a comedy skit.

“Right-angled triangles? Math? Onii-chan, are you getting Diana-san to help you with your exam preparation as well?”

Nodoka was surprised at hearing words that she was used to, so she peeked at the reference book that her brother was reading, only to find...

“.....Pythagoras’s Theorem? Come on, this is middle-school level stuff. You’re studying this again in high school?”

She tilted her head while looking at the reference book that did

not look like it was university exam-level at all.

“No, this appears to be required knowledge in order to use magic, but I was bad at math even in middle school. I won’t get it unless I really start from scratch...”

“Pythagoras’s Theorem is required in order to use magic?”

“Yes. This is the most fundamental knowledge required to make sure your magic hits what you’re aiming at.”

Diana proudly puffed up her chest and continued her explanation.

“For example, if you want to make a pillar of fire appear at your enemy’s feet, you need to correctly determine the spot where your magic will take effect and the enemy’s current position.”

“Eh? Magic doesn’t just hit whatever you’re looking at?”

Nodoka stuck out her hand as if to show what she meant, but Diana shook her head.

“It’s not impossible, per se, but that’s something you can only do once you properly understand the knowledge behind it and practice it over and over again. Some Techno Weapons come with inbuilt rangefinder and pelorus capabilities, but those are mostly add-ons used by old people or children who lack the strength to fight. Packing more components into a weapon make it that much more fragile, heavy, and difficult to use, so ideally people should aim to be able to use sorcery without relying on additional add-on components.”

“That really seems so down to earth. I guess it’s not as easy as eating fruit from some legendary tree, obtaining a beginner-level magic staff, and firing off magic.”

“We’re doing this because Yasuo lacks strength. He needs to properly understand the knowledge and his own limits in order to control the consumption of magic energy, or he’ll run out of it right away and collapse.”

Diana explained it without a shred of ridicule or malice, but it felt like she was saying Yasuo was a good-for-nothing who didn't even have the basic requirements, so Nodoka gave a bitter smile.

"Onii-chan, you've been skipping out on training ever since your club was shut down, right? Also, were you taking math lightly because you want to go into liberal arts?"

"...I have no excuse."

Yasuo couldn't say anything against Nodoka's ability to accurately spot the truth, and he hung his head in shame.

For the next year, Yasuo planned to study for his university exams while concurrently undergoing basic Magitech Knight training under Diana. Once he managed to get into college, he would take a temporary break from studies and go to Ante Lande as the Hero to try and resolve the situation, while still keeping his seat at the college.

He planned to keep his seat at the university because he was thinking of his life after finishing his work as the Hero, and he judged that taking a break from studies right after getting into college was the option with the least risk.

That's why, even with his desire to begin singing again, Yasuo was still unable to decide on what college he wanted to go to. If that unknown assailant called William reappeared, and on top of that, if Hideo left for Ante Lande, the defence of the Kenzaki family in Japan would become overwhelmingly weak.

Even Hideo's desire to return to Ante Lande had been dampened by his fear that his family might come to harm in his absence, and he was uncertain of what he should do.

Hence, Yasuo declared that it was all the more important that Hideo should stay in Japan, and Yasuo, who was one of William's targets, should go to Ante Lande. Over there, he would receive the best protection that could be offered, while he could do more research to uncover William's true nature. Meanwhile, Hideo and

Madoka would protect Nodoka in Japan.

Diana was completely powerless against William, but Hideo was able to destroy his artificial space, and Madoka's power also appeared to work against him to some degree. If Hideo went to Ante Lande under these circumstances, his family would not have the same level of protection, no matter how many Magitech Knights were sent to Japan in his stead.

It was still unknown if Yasuo would be able to gain the same level of power as Hideo, but his father was also supposedly an ordinary high school student when he first arrived at Ante Lande, although there might be some difference in their levels of strength.

In that case, with repeated training and practice, there were high odds that Yasuo would also be able to gain a certain level of strength.

Yasuo had volunteered to go to Ante Lande as a new Hero because he wanted to help Diana, save Japan and his family from danger, and maybe even gain fantasy-like powers of his own. He was basically counting his chickens before they hatched, but he had never expected that he would run into such a roadblock right at the start.

“Incidentally, what I’m explaining to you is still ‘Magic’ that existed during Madoka’s generation. After you learn this, you’ll move on to learning ‘Sorcery’. You will have to study a lot more later on depending on what Techno Weapon you’ll be using, and what element of magic you have an affinity for.”

“With regards to math, you’ll be learning basic functions, high-school level trigonometry, vectors, and trigonometric functions. Depending on your magical affinity, you might also need to study physics and chemistry...”

True, he had aimed to become a Hero in another world because of his feelings of wanting to protect Diana and his family, and for that purpose he was ready to train his body, study hard, and he had also

hoped that he would get some strong power because of it.

However, who could have guessed that he would need to revise his sines, cosines, and tangents in order to do that?

“Ah... is that for stuff like discerning what the material you’re burning is comprised of, plotting the trajectory of your attacks, grasping the arrangement of molecules in ice, and understanding how lightning is transmitted through air?”

Nodoka looked at Yasuo who was visibly losing his resolve to continue and just said some random things that she had learned during her studies for her exams, but...

“That’s right! Nodoka, you’re brilliant!”

Diana nodded while looking pleased.

“Do Dad and Mom use magic while following this process as well?”

“I’ve heard that Madoka had an innate talent for magic, and was able to use it while skipping the fundamental theories entirely. As for Hideo, I’ve heard that the Holy Sword Liutberga has a high-level computing function built into it.”

“What the hell, that’s unfair!!”

“Well, this is Onii-chan we’re talking about. His grades are only good for humanities-related studies, his strength is below average, and as for the powers he appears to have right now...”

Nodoka gave an exasperated look at her older brother who was shouting, stopped talking for a bit, and then gave an uncharacteristically evil smile.

“He’s a little better at singing compared to regular people, and Dad will come to save him if he calls, no matter where he is. It doesn’t feel like he’ll be able to become strong at all.”

Although it depends on how you put it, the fact remains that these are despairingly low-level stats for a young person who wants to become a Hero.

Even if he had not planned on becoming a Hero, no man would want to be in a position where the only thing he could do when faced with danger was calling his father for help.

“Do you really think you’ll be able to make this work while also studying for your university exams? If you need to be good at studies for this, maybe things would move a lot faster if I volunteered instead?”

“Hey, Nodoka, you...”

Even while rejecting Nodoka’s abuse, Yasuo looked like he was on the verge of agreeing with her somewhere in his heart, but...

“It’ll be okay. Yasuo already has the basic quality required to become a Hero.”

““Eh?””

At Diana’s unexpectedly serious tone, the siblings made a surprised expression.

The basic quality required to become a Hero.

Even Yasuo didn’t know what that was. However, Diana continued to speak with conviction.

“It’s something that I and the other Magitech Knights of Resteria cannot possess, due to our responsibilities. It’s something that Nodoka has almost certainly not realized yet. Yasuo already has it, and it shows in his every action.”

“Something Diana-san lacks, and I haven’t realized? The only difference I can see between us and Onii-chan is that he is male and the two of us are female.”

Nodoka tilted her head while trying to understand Diana’s statement which was similar to a riddle. Yasuo, too, didn’t understand what Diana meant, and he looked at her as if waiting for an answer.

However, Diana shook her head while giving a smile that was as

bright as the sun.

Right now, Yasuo did not have the strength to fight. If she put it into words and revealed it to him, there was a risk that he might interpret it wrongly and go on a rampage. Besides, it was not something that he absolutely needed to know.

It would be fine as long as Diana, who looked up to the ideal of a Hero, or someone else who crossed paths with Yasuo in the future recognized that quality in him, and kept it from disappearing.

It was something that everyone was supposed to possess in their hearts, but it would get shackled down over time by the chains known as ‘responsibilities’, and eventually it would become so rusted that it no longer works.

It is an unwavering courage to stand up and protect the one you love.

“It’s okay! I’m sure you will become a Hero who surpasses Hideo someday, Yasuo. Until that day comes, I will pledge my life to support and protect you!”

“I think you should give up... I don’t think Onii-chan has that much value...”

“Expecting too much from me would be a problem, but having such a low estimation of me really hurts. Please, just leave me alone to study the basics in peace!”

The son of the Hero appeared to be faltering at the initial step, but he still did his best to keep going forward. To start with, he took up the middle-school level reference book that was within his reach, and began to prepare his brain to defeat the subjects that he was bad at.

AFTERWORDS

Mobile phones started to become popular among students right around the time when I was in high school.

At that time, the things a student could do with a mobile phone were limited to phone calls, text messages with a limited number of characters per message, and creation of ringtone melodies. Depending on your phone model, you might not have even been able to send messages to someone on a different carrier, and it was a time when most of the displays were monochromatic, so things like “You can choose from one of green, white, red, or blue colors!” were still valid selling points.

There was no such thing as a wallpaper or background image, and only a few high-end models had a camera function that you needed to attach extra equipment to use.

People who wanted to stand out from the crowd could decorate the handset and replace the standard antenna with one that blinked on receiving a signal. However, doing that didn’t improve the functionality of the handset in any way.

It was just an additional feature meant to improve the appearance of the mobile phone. Even without considering that, it was a time when strict schools had rules about wearing the school uniform even when meeting up with friends outside, and even carrying a mobile phone was against the rules.

The logic behind that rule was to not bring things to school that were not related to studies, but even elementary school students nowadays carry one for the sake of safety, and at the middle and high school level, talking to classmates is being replaced by conversations using a messaging application on a smartphone. It’s interesting to see how the conditions have changed.

It’s nice to meet you, or maybe it’s just been a long time. My name

is Wagahara Satoshi.

My first mobile phone was a bar-shaped model which had no internet connection capabilities. All it could handle were voice calls and short messages. Even so, at that time, I was excited about owning such a futuristic device, and along with my Famicom, it is one of the few things I begged my parents to buy for me.

I'd exchange useless messages with friends even though we had nothing in particular to talk about, carefully hide it deep inside my bag at school to keep the teachers from finding it, and do my best at creating ringtone melodies using triad notes. On the way to school in the train, I would use my Walkman (which would also be confiscated by a teacher if found) to listen to 'My Best' MiniDisc that I created by dubbing titles from CDs and MDs, and inputting the titles on the keypad.

However, now is the age when high school students play social games on their smartphones while listening to downloaded music on their way to school.

When I first came up with the idea for this book, "The Hero's Son", I was worried if an old man like me from the Triassic period of digital devices would be able to write about a modern high-school student using my imagination alone.

The educational environment, digital environment, and manner of examinations that surround a student, never mind a decade, it wouldn't be an exaggeration to say they become obsolete in a mere three years. That's why, for writing this book, I used the current methods of examinations and the current style of prep schools as a reference.

Not only exams, I was also able to obtain a lot of important information regarding the current practices of education, and the daily life of students in school. I would like to take this opportunity to sincerely thank Nakagawa-sensei, Takeda-sensei, and Hayashi-sensei from a certain prep school for readily agreeing to help me

collect data.

This book, “The Hero’s Son”, is about a young man who thinks doing your best is not required to live, and he faces a sudden situation that causes him to want to overcome his definition of doing his best.

I would like to create a new story about a “Hero living in Modern Japan” along with 029-san who created “Hataraku Maou-sama!” along with me, and knows me inside out.

I hope we can once again meet in the chaotic land of the Hero’s Trial (exams)!

Goodbye!



TRANSLATOR'S NOTES AND REFERENCES

Chapter 1

[1] Isekai” is written in katakana here.

[2] Yuusha” is written in katakana here.

[3] Takemitsu swords: Swords used in theatrical plays. they’re made from wood and covered in metallic foil to make them look real.

[4] Imitation sword: Made from metal, but not sharpened and has no cutting edge.

[5] Uchigatana: <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Uchigatana>.

[6] Shirahadori: The act of catching a sword blade between the palms. Extremely dangerous.

[7] Namu Amida Butsu: A Buddhist sutra. See <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Nianfo> for more details.

[8] Ohyou: Halibut. Diana is confused between sutras (okyou) and the halibut fish (ohyou).

CHAPTER 2

[1] Knight: Knight(騎士) and the ‘Knight’ part of Magitech Knight (魔導機士) are pronounced the same way but written differently.

CHAPTER 3

[1] https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Gloria_in_excelsis_Deo

[2] A folktale about borrowing someone's image to make yourself look more important.

http://www.worldoftales.com/Asian_folktales/Chinese_Folkta

CHAPTER 4

[1] First-class compartments on bullet trains are called ‘Green Cars’.

EPILOGUE

[1] The kanji (康) in Yasuo's name, and the kanji (和) in Nodoka's name both mean 'peace'.